MISSY

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MISSY

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"'*But surely you admire women who achieve, women like George Eliot and Frances Hodgson Burnett?*'

"'*I'd hate to have to take one of them to a dance,' said Mr. Briggs*"

Well Fuck you MR. B!

MISSY

BY

DANA GATLIN

AUTHOR OF

"THE FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION"

FRONTISPIECE BY

W. B. KING

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

1920

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TO
VIOLA ROSEBORO'

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MISSY

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I

The Flame Divine

MELISSA came home from Sunday-school with a feeling she had never had before. To be sure she was frequently discovering, these days, feelings she had never had before. That was the marvellous reward of having grown to be so old; she was ten, now, an advanced age—almost grown up! She could look back, across the eons which separated her from seven-years-old, and dimly re-vision, as a stranger, the little girl who cried her first day in the Primary Grade. How absurd seemed that bashful, timid, ignorant little silly! She knew nothing at all. She still thought there was a Santa Claus!—would you believe that? And, even at eight, she had lingering fancies of fairies dancing on the flower-beds by moonlight, and talking in some mysterious language with the flowers!

Now she was much wiser. She knew that fairies lived only in books and pictures; that flowers could not actually converse. Well . . . she *almost* knew. Sometimes, when she was all alone—out in the sum-

merhouse on a drowsy afternoon, or in the glimmering twilight when that one very bright and knowing star peered in at her, solitary, on the side porch, or when, later, the moonshine stole through the window and onto her pillow, so thick and white she could almost feel it with her fingers—at such times vague fancies would get tangled up with the facts of reality, and disturb her new, assured sense of wisdom. Suddenly she'd find herself all mixed up, confused as to what actually *was* and *wasn't*.

But she never worried long over that. Life was too complex to permit much time for worry over anything; too full and compelling in every minute of the long, long hours which yet seemed not long enough to hold the new experiences and emotions which ceaselessly flooded in upon her.

The emotion she felt this Sunday was utterly new. It was not contentment nor enjoyment merely, nor just happiness. For, in the morning as mother dressed her in her embroidered white "best" dress, and as she walked through the June sunshine to the Presbyterian church, trying to remember not to skip, she had been quite happy. And she had still felt happy during the Sunday-school lesson, while Miss Simpson explained how our Lord multiplied the loaves and fishes so as to feed the multitude. How wonderful it must have been to be alive when our Lord walked and talked among men!

Her feeling of peaceful contentment intensified a little when they all stood up to sing,

"*Let me be a little sunbeam for Jesus—*"

and she seemed, then, to feel a subtle sort of glow, as from an actual sunbeam, warming her whole being.

But the marvellous new feeling did not definitely begin till after Sunday-school was over, when she was helping Miss Simpson collect the song-books. Not the big, thick hymn-books used for the church service, but smaller ones, with pasteboard backs and different tunes. Melissa would have preferred the Sunday-school to use the big, cloth-covered hymnals. Somehow they looked more religious; just as their tunes, with slow, long-drawn cadences, somehow sounded more religious than the Sunday-school's cheerful tunes. Why this should be so Melissa didn't know; there were many things she didn't yet understand about religion. But she asked no questions; experience had taught her that the most serious questions may be strangely turned into food for laughter by grown-ups.

It was when she carried the song-books into the choir-room to stack them on some chairs, that she noticed the choir had come in and was beginning to practise a real hymn. She loitered. It was an especially religious hymn, very slow and mournful. They sang:

"A-a—sle-e-e-ep in Je-e-e—sus—
Ble-e-es—ed sle-e-e-ep—
From which none e-e-ev—er
Wake to we-e-e-ep—"

The choir did not observe Melissa; did not suspect that state of deliciousness which, starting from the

skin, slowly crept into her very soul. She stood there, very unobtrusive, drinking in the sadly sweet sounds. Up on the stained-glass window the sunlight filtered through blue-and-red-and-golden angels, sending shafts of heavenly colour across the floor; and the fibres of her soul, enmeshed in music, seemed to stretch out to mingle with that heavenly colour. It was hard to separate herself from that sound and colour which was not herself. Tears came to her eyes; she couldn't tell why, for she wasn't sad. Oh, if she could stand there listening forever! —could feel like this forever!

The choir was practising for a funeral that afternoon, but Melissa didn't know that. She had never attended a funeral. She didn't even know it was a funeral song. She only knew that when, at last, they stopped singing and filed out of the choir-room, she could hardly bear to have them go. She wished she might follow them, might tuck herself away in the auditorium somewhere and stay for the church service. But her mother didn't allow her to do that. Mother insisted that church service and Sunday-school, combined, were too much for a little girl, and would give her headaches.

So there was nothing for Missy to do but go home. The sun shone just as brightly as on her hither journey but now she had no impulse to skip. She walked along sedately, in rhythm to inner, long-drawn cadences. The cadences permeated her—were herself. She was sad, yet pleasantly, thrillingly so. It was divine.

When she reached home, she went into the empty front-parlour and hunted out the big, cloth-covered hymnal that was there. She found "Asleep in Jesus" and played it over and over on the piano. The bass was a trifle difficult, but that didn't matter. Then she found other hymns which were in accord with her mood: "Abide with Me"; "Nearer My God to Thee"; "One Sweetly Solemn Thought." The last was sublimely beautiful; it almost stole her favour away from "Asleep in Jesus." Not quite, though.

She was re-playing her first favourite when the folks all came in from church. There were father and mother, grandpa and grandma Merriam who lived in the south part of town, Aunt Nettie, and Cousin Pete Merriam. Cousin Pete's mother was dead and his father out in California on a long business trip, so he was spending that summer in Cherryvale with his grandparents.

Melissa admired Cousin Pete very much, for he was big and handsome and wore more stylish-looking clothes than did most of the young men in Cherryvale. Also, he was very old—nineteen, and a sophomore at the State University. Very old. Naturally he was much wiser than Missy, for all her acquired wisdom. She stood in awe of him. He had a way of asking her absurd, foolish questions about things that everybody knew; and when, to be polite, she had to answer him seriously in his own foolish vein, he would laugh at her! So, though she admired him, she always had an impulse to run away from him.

She would have liked, now, in this heavenly, religious mood, to run away lest he might ask her embarrassing questions about it. But, before she had the chance, grandpa said:

"Why Missy, playing hymns? You'll be church organist before we know it!"

Missy blushed.

"'Asleep in Jesus' is my favourite, I think," commented grandma. "It's the one I'd like sung over me at the last. Play it again, dear."

But Pete had picked up a sheet of music from the top of the piano.

"Let's have this, Missy." He turned to his grandmother. "Ought to hear her do this rag—I've been teaching her double-bass."

Missy shrank back as he placed the rag-time on the music-rest.

"Oh, I'd rather not—*to-day*."

Pete smiled down at her—his amiable but condescending smile.

"What's the matter with to-day?" he asked.

Missy blushed again.

"Oh, I don't know—I just don't feel that way, I guess."

"Don't feel that way?" repeated Pete. "You're temperamental, are you? How *do* you feel, Missy?"

Missy feared she was letting herself in for embarrassment; but this was a holy subject. So she made herself answer:

"I guess I feel religious."

Pete shouted.

"She feels religious! That's a good one! She guesses she—"

"Peter, you should be ashamed of yourself!" reproved his grandmother.

"She's a scream!" he insisted. "Religious! That kid!"

"Well," defended Missy, timid and puzzled, but wounded to unwonted bravery, "isn't it proper to feel like that on the Sabbath?"

Pete shouted again.

"Peter—stop that! You should be ashamed of yourself!" It was his grandfather this time. Grandpa moved over to the piano and removed the ragtime from off the hymnal, pausing to pat Missy on the head.

But Peter was not the age to be easily squelched.

"What does it feel like, Missy—the religious feeling?"

Missy, her eyes bright behind their blur, didn't answer. Indeed, she could not have defined that sweetly sad glow, now so cruelly crushed, even had she wanted to.

Missy didn't enjoy her dinner as much as she usually did the midday Sunday feasts when grandpa and grandma came to eat with them. She felt embarrassed and shy. Of course she had to answer when asked why she wasn't eating her drumstick, and whether the green apples in grandma's orchard had given her an "upset," and other direct questions; but when she could, she kept silent. She was

glad Pete didn't talk to her much. Yet, now and then, she caught his eyes upon her in a look of sardonic enquiry, and quickly averted her own.

Her unhappiness lasted till the visitors had departed. Then, after aimlessly wandering about, she took her Holy Bible out to the summerhouse. She was contemplating a surprise for grandpa and grandma. Next week mother and Aunt Nettie were going over to Aunt Anna's in Junction City for a few days; during their absence Missy was to stay with her grandparents. And to surprise them, she was learning by heart a whole Psalm.

She planned to spring it upon them the first night at family prayers. At grandma's they had prayers every night before going to bed. First grandpa read a long chapter out of the Holy Bible, then they all knelt down, grandpa beside his big Morris chair, grandma beside her little willow rocker, and whoever else was present beside whatever chair he'd been sitting in. Grandpa prayed a long prayer; grandma a shorter one; then, if any of the grandchildren were there, they must say a verse by heart. Missy's first verse had been, "Jesus wept." But she was just a tiny thing then. When she grew bigger, she repeated, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." Later she accomplished the more showy, "In My Father's house are many mansions; I go there to prepare a place for you."

But this would be her first whole Psalm. She pictured every one's delighted and admiring surprise.

After much deliberation she had decided upon the Psalm in which David sings his song of faith, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

How beautiful it was! So deep and so hard to understand, yet, somehow, all the more beautiful for that. She murmured aloud, "I will fear no evil—for Thou art with me—Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me"; and wondered what the rod and staff really were.

But best of all she liked the last verse:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

To dwell in the house of the Lord forever!—How wonderful! What *was* the house of the Lord? . . . Missy leaned back in the summerhouse seat, and gazed dreamily out at the silver-white clouds drifting lazily across the sky; in the side-yard her nasturtium bed glowed up from the slick green grass like a mass of flame; a breeze stirred the flame to gentle motion and touched the ramblers on the summerhouse, shaking out delicious scents; distantly from the back-yard came the tranquil, drowsy sounds of unseen chickens. Missy listened to the chickens; regarded sky and flowers and green—colours so lovely as to almost hurt you—and sniffed the fragrant air. . . . All *this* must be the house of the Lord! *Here*, surely goodness and mercy would follow her all the days of her life.

Thus, slowly, the marvellous new feeling stole back and took possession of her. She could no longer bear

just sitting there quiet, just feeling. She craved some sort of expression. So she rose and moved slowly over the slick green grass, pausing by the blazing nasturtium bed to pick a few vivid blossoms. These she pinned to her dress; then went very leisurely on to the house—to the parlour—to the piano—to "Asleep in Jesus."

She played it "with expression." Her soul now seemed to be flowing out through her fingers and to the keyboard; the music came not from the keyboard, really, but from her soul. Rapture!

But presently her mood was rudely interrupted by mother's voice at the door.

"Missy, Aunt Nettie's lying down with a headache. I'm afraid the piano disturbs her."

"All right, mother."

Lingeringly Missy closed the hymnal. She couldn't forbear a little sigh. Perhaps mother noted the sigh. Anyway, she came close and said:

"I'm sorry, dear. I think it's nice the way you've learned to play hymns."

Missy glanced up; and for a moment forgetting that grown-ups don't always understand, she breathed:

"Oh, mother, it's *heavenly!* You can't imagine—"

She remembered just in time, and stopped short. But mother didn't embarrass her by asking her to explain something that couldn't be explained in words. She only laid her hand, for a second, on the sleek brown head.

The marvellous feeling endured through the afternoon, and through supper, and through the evening —clear up to the time Missy undressed and said her prayers. Some special sweetness seemed to have crept into saying prayers; our Lord Jesus seemed very personal and very close as she whispered to Him a postlude:

"I will fear no evil, for Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I'll dwell in Thy house forever, O Lord—Amen."

For a time she lay open-eyed in her little white bed. A flood of moonlight came through the window to her pillow. She felt that it was a shining benediction from our Lord Himself. And indeed it may have been. Gradually her eyes closed. She smiled as she slept.

The grace of God continued to be there when she awoke. It seemed an unusual morning. The sun was brighter than on ordinary mornings; the birds outside were twittering more loudly; even the lawn-mower which black Jeff was already rolling over the grass had assumed a peculiarly agreeable clatter. And though, at breakfast, father grumbled at his eggs being overdone, and though mother complained that the laundress hadn't come, and though Aunt Nettie's head was still aching, all these things, somehow, seemed trivial and of no importance.

Missy could scarcely wait to get her dusting and other little "chores" done, so that she might go to the piano.

However, she hadn't got half-way through "One Sweetly Solemn Thought" before her mother appeared.

"Missy! what in the world do you mean? I've told you often enough you must finish your practising before strumming at other things."

Strumming!

But Missy said nothing in defence. She only hung her head. Her mother went on:

"Now, I don't want to speak to you again about this. Get right to your exercises—I hope I won't have to hide that hymn-book!"

Mother's voice was stern. The laundress's defection and other domestic worries may have had something to do with it. But Missy couldn't consider that; she was too crushed. In stricken silence she attacked the "exercises."

Not once during that day had she a chance to let out, through music, any of her surcharged devotionalism. Mother kept piling on her one errand after another. Mother was in an unwonted flurry; for the next day was the one she and Aunt Nettie were going to Junction City and there were, as she put it, "a hundred and one things to do."

Through all those tribulations Missy reminded herself of "Thy rod and Thy staff." She didn't yet know just what these aids to comfort were; but the Psalmist had said of them, "they shall comfort me." And, somehow, she did find comfort. That is what Faith does.

And that night, after she had said her prayers

and got into bed, once more the grace of God rode in on the moonlight to rest upon her pillow.

But the next afternoon, when she had to kiss mother good-bye, a great tide of loneliness rushed over Missy, and all but engulfed her. She had always known she loved mother tremendously, but till that moment she had forgotten how very much. She had to concentrate hard upon "Thy rod and Thy staff" before she was able to blink back her tears. And mother, noticing the act, commented on her little daughter's bravery, and blinked back some tears of her own.

In the excitement of packing up to go to grandma's house, Missy to a degree forgot her grief. She loved to go to grandma's house. She liked everything about that house: the tall lilac hedge that separated the yard from the Curriers' yard next door; the orchard out in back where grew the apples which sometimes gave her an "upset"; the garden where grandpa spent hours and hours "cultivating" his vegetables; and grandma's own particular garden, which was given over to tall gaudy hollyhocks, and prim rows of verbena, snap-dragon, phlox, spicy pinks, heliotrope, and other flowers such as all grandmothers ought to have.

And she liked the house itself, with its many unusual and delightful appurtenances: no piano—an organ in the parlour, the treadles of which you must remember to keep pumping, or the music would wheeze and stop; the "what-not" in the corner, its shelves filled with fascinating curios—shells of all

kinds, especially a big conch shell which, held close to the ear, still sang a song of the sea; the marble-topped centre-table, and on it the interesting "album" of family photographs, and the mysterious contrivance which made so lifelike the double "views" you placed in the holder; and the lamp with its shade dripping crystal bangles, like huge raindrops off an umbrella; and the crocheted "tidies" on all the rocking-chairs, and the carpet-covered footstools sitting demurely round on the floor, and the fringed lambrequin on the mantel, and the enormous fan of peacock feathers spreading out on the wall—oh, yes, grandma's was a fascinating place!

Then besides, of course, she adored grandpa and grandma. They were charming and unlike other people, and very, very good. Grandpa was slow-moving, and tall and broad—even taller and broader than father; and he must be terribly wise because he was Justice-of-the-Peace, and because he didn't talk much. Other children thought him a person to be feared somewhat, but Missy liked to tuck her hand in his enormous one and talk to him about strange, mysterious things.

Grandma wasn't nearly so big—indeed she wasn't much taller than Missy herself; and she was proud of her activity—her "spryness," she called it. She boasted of her ability to stoop over and, without bending her knees, to lay both palms flat on the floor. Even Missy's mother couldn't do that, and sometimes she seemed to grow a little tired of being reminded of it. Grandma liked to talk as much as

grandpa liked to keep silent; and always, to the running accompaniment of her tongue, she kept her hands busied, whether "puttering about" in her house or flower-garden, or crocheting "tidies," or knitting little mittens, or creating the multi-coloured paper-flowers which helped make her house so alluring.

That night for supper they had beefsteak and hot biscuits and custard pie; and grandma let her eat these delicacies which were forbidden at home. She even let her drink coffee! Not that Missy cared especially for coffee—it had a bitter taste; but drinking it made her feel grown-up. She always felt more grown-up at grandma's than at home. She was "company," and they showed her a consideration one never receives at home.

After supper Cousin Pete went out somewhere, and the other three had a long, pleasant evening. Another agreeable feature about staying at grandma's was that they didn't make such a point of her going to bed early. The three of them sat out on the porch till the night came stealing up; it covered the street and the yard with darkness, crawled into the tree tops and the rose-bushes and the lilac-hedge. It hid all the familiar objects of daytime, except the street-lamp at the corner and certain windows of the neighbours' houses, which now showed square and yellow. Of the people on the porch next door, and of those passing in the street, only the voices remained; and, sometimes, a glowing point of red which was a cigar.

Presently the moon crept up from behind the Jones's house, peeping stealthily, as if to make sure that all was right in Cherryvale. And then everything became visible again, but in a magically beautiful way; it was now like a picture from a fairy-tale. Indeed, this was the hour when your belief in fairies was most apt to return to you.

The locusts began to sing. They sang loudly. And grandma kept up her chatter. But within Missy everything seemed to become very quiet. Suddenly she felt sad, a peculiar, serene kind of sadness. It grew from the inside out—now and then almost escaping in a sigh. Because it couldn't quite escape, it hurt; she envied the locusts who were letting their sadness escape in that reiterant, tranquil song.

She was glad when, at last, grandpa said:

"How'd you like to go in and play me a tune, Missy?"

"Oh, I'd love to, grandpa!" Missy jumped up eagerly.

So grandpa lighted the parlour lamp, whose crystal bangles now looked like enormous diamonds; and a delicious time commenced. Grandpa got out his cloth-covered hymnal, and she played again those hymns which mingle so inexplicably with the feelings inside you. Not even her difficulties with the organ—such as forgetting occasionally to treadle, or having the keys pop up soundlessly from under her fingers—could mar that feeling. Especially when grandpa added his bass to the music, a deep bass so

impressive as to make it improper to question its harmony, even in your own mind.

Grandma had come in and seated herself in her little willow rocker; she was rocking in time to the music, her eyes closed, and saying nothing—just listening to the two of them. And, playing those hymns, with grandpa singing and grandma listening, the new religious feeling grew and grew and grew in Missy till it seemed to flow out of her and fill the room. It flowed on out and filled the yard, the town, the world; and upward, upward, upward—she was one with the sky and moon and stars. . . .

At last, in a little lull, grandpa said:

"Now, Missy, *my* song—you know."

Missy knew very well what grandpa's favourite was; it was one of the first pieces she had learned by heart. So she played for him "Silver Threads among the Gold."

"Thanks, baby," said grandpa when she had finished. There was a suspicious brightness in his eyes. And a suspicious brightness in grandma's, too. So, though she wasn't unhappy at all, she felt her own eyes grow moist. Grandpa and grandma weren't really unhappy, either. Why, when people are not really unhappy at all, do their eyes fill just of themselves?

And now was the moment of the great surprise at hand. Missy could scarcely wait. It must be admitted that, during the interminable time that grandpa was reading his chapter—it was even a longer chapter than usual to-night—and while grandma

was reading her shorter one, Missy was not attending. She was repeating to herself the Twenty-third Psalm. And even when they all knelt, grandpa beside the big Morris chair and grandma beside the little willow rocker and Missy beside the "patent rocker" with the prettiest crocheted tidy—her thoughts were still in a divine channel exclusively her own.

But now, at last, came the time for that channel to be widened; she closed her eyes tighter, clasped her hands together, and began:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. . . ."

How beautiful it was! Unconsciously her voice lifted—quavered—lowered—lifted again, with "expression." And she had the oddest complex sensation; she could, through her tightly closed eyes, vision herself kneeling there; while, at the same time, she could feel her spirit floating away, mingling with the air, melting into the night, fusing with all the divine mystery of heaven and earth. And her soul yearned for more mystery, for more divinity, with an inexpressible yearning.

Yet all the time she was conscious of the dramatic figure she made, and of how pleased and impressed her audience must be; in fact, as her voice "tremuloed" on that last sublime "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," she unclosed one eye to note the effect.

Both the grey heads remained prayerfully bent; but at her "Amen" both of them lifted. And oh! what a reward was the expression in those two pairs of eyes!

Grandma came swiftly to her and kissed her, and exclaimed:

"Why, however did you learn all that long Psalm, dear? And you recited it so beautifully, too!—Not a single mistake! I never was prouder in my life!"

Grandpa didn't kiss her, but he kept saying over and over:

"Just think of that baby!—the dear little baby."

And Missy, despite her spiritual exaltation, couldn't help feeling tremendously pleased.

"It was a surprise—I thought you'd be surprised," she remarked with satisfaction.

Grandma excitedly began to ask all kinds of questions as to how Missy came to pick out that particular Psalm, and what difficulties she experienced in learning it all; but it was grandpa who, characteristically, enquired:

"And what does it mean to you, Missy?"

"Mean—?" she repeated.

"Yes. For instance, what does that last verse mean?"

"'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life—?' *That*—?"

"Yes, baby."

"Why, I think I see myself walking through some big, thick woods. It's springtime, and the trees are

all green, and the grass slick and soft. And birds are singing, and the wind's singing in the leaves, too. And the sun's shining, and all the clouds have silver edges."

She paused.

"Yes, dear," said grandpa.

"That's the house of the Lord," she explained.

"Yes, dear," said grandpa again. "What else?"

"Well, I'm skipping and jumping along, for I'm happy to be in the house of the Lord. And there are three little fairies, all dressed in silver and gold, and with paper-flowers in their hair, and long diamond bangles hanging like fringe on their skirts. They're following me, and they're skipping and jumping, too. They're the three fairies in the verse."

"The three fairies?" Grandpa seemed puzzled.

"Yes. It says 'Surely goodness and mercy,' you know."

"But that makes only two, doesn't it?" said grandpa, still puzzled.

Missy laughed at his stupidity.

"Why, no!—Three!" She counted them off on her fingers: "Surely—and Goodness—and Mercy. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes, dear—I see now," said grandpa, very slowly. "I wasn't counting Surely."

Just then came a chuckle from the doorway. Missy hadn't seen Pete enter, else she would have been less free in revealing her real thoughts. What had he overheard?

Still laughing, Pete advanced into the room.

"So there's a fairy named 'Surely,' is there? What's the colour of her eyes, Missy?"

Missy shrank a little closer into the haven of grandpa's knees. And grandpa, in the severe voice that made the other children stand in awe of him, said:

"That will do, Peter!"

But Peter, unawed, went on:

"I know, grandpa—but she's such a funny little dingbat! And now, that she's turned pious—"

Grandpa interrupted him with a gesture of the hand.

"I said that'd do, Peter. If *you'd* find some time to attend prayers instead of cavorting round over town, it wouldn't hurt you any."

Then grandma, who, though she was fond of Missy, was fond of Pete also, joined in defensively:

"Pete hasn't been cavorting round over town, grandpa—he's just been over to the Curriers'."

At that Missy turned interested eyes upon her big cousin. He'd been calling on Polly Currier again! Polly Currier was one of the prettiest big girls in Cherryvale. Missy gazed at Pete, so handsome in his stylish-looking blue serge coat and sharply creased white ducks, debonairly twirling the bamboo walking-stick which the Cherryvale boys, half-enviously, twitted him about, and felt the wings of Romance whirring in the already complicated air. For this additional element of interest he furnished, she could almost forgive him his scoffing attitude toward her own most serious affairs.

But Pete, fortunately for his complacency, didn't

suspect the reason for her concentrated though friendly gaze.

All in all, Missy felt quite at peace when she went upstairs. Grandma tucked her into bed—the big, extraordinarily soft feather-bed which was one of the outstanding features of grandma's fascinating house.

And there—wonder of wonders!—the moon, through grandma's window, found her out just as readily as though she'd been in her own little bed at home. Again it carried in the grace of God, to rest through the night on her pillow.

Next day was an extremely happy day. She had coffee for breakfast, and was permitted by Alma, the hired girl, to dry all the cups and saucers. Then she dusted the parlour, including all the bric-a-brac, which made dusting here an engrossing occupation. Later she helped grandpa hoe the cabbages, and afterward "puttered around" with grandma in the flower-garden. Then she and grandma listened, very quietly, through a crack in the nearly-closed door while grandpa conducted a hearing in the parlour. To tell the truth, Missy wasn't greatly interested in whether Mrs. Brenning's chickens had scratched up Mrs. Jones's tomato-vines, but she pretended to be interested because grandma was.

And then, after the hearing was over, and the Justice-of-the-Peace had become just grandpa again, Missy went into the parlour and played hymns. Then came dinner, a splendid and heavy repast which constrained her to take a nap. After the nap she felt

better, and sat out on the front porch to learn crocheting from grandma.

For a while Pete sat with them, and Polly Currier from next door came over, too. She looked awfully pretty all in white—white shirtwaist and white duck skirt and white canvas oxfords. Presently Pete suggested that Polly go into the parlour with him to look at some college snapshots. Missy wondered why he didn't bring them out to the porch where it was cooler, but she was too polite to ask.

They stayed in there a long time—what were they doing? For long spaces she couldn't even hear their voices. Grandma chattered away with her usual vivacity; presently she suggested that they leave off crocheting and work on paper-flowers a while. What a delight! Missy was just learning the intricacies of peonies, and adored to squeeze the rosy tissue-paper over the head of a hat-pin and observe the amazing result.

"Run up to my room, dear," said grandma. "You'll find the box on the closet shelf."

Missy knew the "paper-flower box." It was a big hat-box, appropriately covered with pink-posied paper—a quaintly beautiful box.

In the house, passing the parlour door, she tip-toed, scarcely knowing why. There was now utter silence in the parlour—why were they so still? Perhaps they had gone out somewhere. Without any definite plan, but still tip-toeing in the manner she and grandma had approached to overhear the law-suit, she moved toward the partly-closed door. Through

the crevice they were out of vision, but she could hear a subdued murmur—they *were* in there after all! Missy, too interested to be really conscious of her act, strained her ears.

Polly Currier murmured:

"Why, what do you mean?—what are you doing?"

Pete murmured:

"What a question!—I'm trying to kiss you."

"Let me go!—you're mussing my dress! You *can't* kiss me—let me go!"

Pete murmured:

"Not till you let me kiss you!"

Polly Currier murmured:

"I suppose that's the way you talk to all the girls!—I know you college men!"

Pete murmured, a whole world of reproach in one word:

"*Polly.*"

They became silent—a long silence. Missy stood petrified behind the door; her breathing ceased but her heart beat quickly. Here was Romance—not the made-up kind of Romance you surreptitiously read in mother's magazines, but real Romance! And she —Missy—knew them both! And they were just the other side of the door!

Too thrilled to reflect upon the nature of her deed, scarcely conscious of herself as a being at all, Missy craned her neck and peered around the door. They were sitting close together on the divan. Pete's arm was about Polly Currier's shoulder. And he *was* kissing her! Curious, that! Hadn't she just heard

Polly tell him that he couldn't? . . . Oh, beautiful!

She started noiselessly to withdraw, but her foot struck the conch shell which served as a door-stop. At the noise two startled pairs of eyes were upon her immediately; and Pete, leaping up, advanced upon her with a fierce whisper:

"You little spy-eye!—What're you up to? You little spy-eye!"

A swift wave of shame engulfed Missy.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she cried in a stricken voice. "I didn't mean to, Pete—I—"

He interrupted her, still in that fierce whisper:

"Stop yelling, can't you! No, I suppose you 'didn't mean to'—Right behind the door!" His eyes withered her.

"Truly, I didn't, Pete." Her own voice, now, had sunk to a whisper. "Cross my heart I didn't!"

But he still glared.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself—always sneaking round! You ought to be *ashamed* of yourself!"

"Oh, I am, Pete," she quavered, though, in fact, she wasn't sure in just what lay the shamefulness of her deed; till he'd spoken she had felt nothing but Romance in the air.

"Well, you ought to be," Pete reiterated. He hesitated a second, then went on:

"You aren't going to blab it all around, are you?"

"Oh, no!" breathed Missy, horrified at such a suggestion.

"Well, see that you don't! I'll give you some candy to-morrow."

"Yes—candy," came Polly's voice faintly from the divan.

Then, as the subject seemed to be exhausted, Missy crept away, permeated with the sense of her sin.

It was horrible! To have sinned just when she'd found the wonderful new feeling. Just when she'd resolved to be good always, that she might dwell in the house of the Lord forever. She hadn't intended to sin; but she must have been unusually iniquitous. Pete's face had told her that. It was particularly horrible because sin had stolen upon her so suddenly. Does sin always take you unawares, that way? A new and black fear settled heavily over her.

When she finally returned to the porch with the paper-flowers box, she was embarrassed by grandma's asking what had kept her so long. It would have been easy to make up an excuse, but this new sense of sin restrained her from lying. So she mumbled unintelligibly, till grandma interrupted:

"Do you feel sick, Missy?" she asked anxiously.

"No, ma'am."

"Are you sure? You ate so much at dinner. Maybe you didn't take a long enough nap."

"I'm not sleepy, grandma."

But grandma insisted on feeling her forehead—her hands. They *were* hot.

"I think I'd better put you to bed for a little while," said grandma. "You're feverish. And if

you're not better by night, you mustn't go to the meeting."

Missy's heart sank, weighted with a new fear. It would be an unbearable calamity to miss going to the meeting. For, that night, a series of "revivals" were to start at the Methodist Church; and, though father was a Presbyterian (to oblige mother), grandpa and grandma were Methodists and would go every night; and so long as mother was away, she could go to meeting with them. In the fervour of the new religious feeling she craved sanctified surroundings. So, though she didn't feel at all sick and though she wanted desperately to make paper-flowers, she docilely let herself be put to bed. Anyway, perhaps it was just a penance sent to her by our Lord, to make atonement for her sin.

By supper-time grandma agreed that she seemed well enough to go. Throughout the meal Pete, who was wearing an aloof and serious manner, refrained from looking at her, and she strived to keep her own anxious gaze away from him. He wasn't going to the meeting with the other three.

Just as the lingering June twilight was beginning to darken—the most peaceful hour of the day—Missy walked off sedately between her grandparents. She was wearing her white "best dress." It seemed appropriate that your best clothes should be always involved in the matter of church going; that the spiritual beatification within should be reflected by the garments without.

The Methodist church in Cherryvale prided itself

that it was not "new-fangled." It was not nearly so pretentious in appearance as was the Presbyterian church. Missy, in her heart, preferred stained-glass windows and their glorious reflections, as an asset to religion; but at night services you were not apt to note that deficiency.

She sat well up front with her grandparents, as befitted their position as pillars of the church, and from this vantage had a good view of the proceedings. She could see every one in the choir, seated up there behind the organ on the side platform. Polly Currier was in the choir; she wasn't a Methodist, but she had a flute-like soprano voice, and the Methodists—whom all the town knew had "poor singing"—had overstepped the boundaries of sectarianism for this revival. Polly looked like an angel in pink lawn and rose-wreathed leghorn hat; she couldn't know that Missy gazed upon her with secret adoration as a creature of Romance—one who had been kissed! Missy continued to gaze at Polly during the preliminary songs—tunes rather disappointing, not so beautiful as Missy's own favourite hymns—till the preacher appeared.

The Reverend Poole—"Brother" Poole as grandpa called him, though he wasn't a relation—was a very tall, thin man with a blonde, rather vacuous face; but at exhortation and prayer he "had the gift." For so good a man, he had a remarkably poor opinion of the virtues of his fellow-men. Missy couldn't understand half his fiery eloquence; but she felt his inspiration; and she gathered that most of

the congregation must be sinners. Knowing herself to be a sinner, she wasn't so much surprised at that.

Finally Brother Poole, with quavering voice, urged all sinners to come forward and kneel at the feet of Jesus, and pray to be "washed in the blood of the lamb." Thus would their sins be forgiven them, and their souls be born anew. Missy's soul quivered and stretched up to be born anew. So, with several other sinners—including grandpa and grandma whom she had never before suspected of sin—she unhesitatingly walked forward. She invoked the grace of God; her head, her body, her feet seemed very light and remote as she walked; she seemed, rather, to float; her feet scarcely touched the red-ingrain aisle "runner"—she was nearly all spirit. She knelt before the altar between grandpa and grandma, one hand tight-clasped in grandpa's.

Despite her exaltation, she was conscious of material things. For instance she noted that Mrs. Brenning was on the other side of grandma, and wondered whether she were atoning for the sins of her chickens against Mrs. Jones's tomato-vines; she noticed, too, that Mrs. Brenning's hat had become askew, which gave her a queer, unsuitable, rakish look. Yet Missy didn't feel like laughing. She felt like closing her eyes and waiting to be born anew. But, before closing her eyes, she sent a swift glance up at the choir platform. Polly Currier was still up there, looking very placid as she sang with the rest of the choir. They were singing a rollicking tune. She listened—

"Pull for the shore, sailor! Pull for the shore!
Leave the poor old strangled wretch, and pull for the shore!"

Who was the old strangled wretch? A sinner, doubtless. Ah, the world was full of sin. She looked again at Polly. Polly's placidity was reassuring; evidently *she* was not a sinner. But it was time to close her eyes. However, before doing so, she sent a swift upward glance toward the preacher. He had a look on his face as though an electric light had been turned on just inside. He was praying fervently for God's grace upon "these Thy repentant creatures." Missy shut her eyes, repented violently, and awaited the miracle. What would happen? How would it feel, when her soul was born anew? Surely it must be time. She waited and waited, while her limbs grew numb and her soul continued to quiver and stretch up. But in vain; she somehow didn't feel the grace of God nearly as much as last Sunday when the Presbyterian choir was singing "Asleep in Jesus," while the sun shone divinely through the stained-glass window.

She felt cheated and very sad when, at last, the preacher bade the repentant ones stand up again. Evidently she hadn't repented hard enough. Very soberly she walked back to the pew and took her place between grandpa and grandma. They looked rather sober, too; she wondered if they, also, had had trouble with their souls.

Then Brother Poole bade the repentant sinners to "stand up and testify." One or two of the older sinners, who had repented before, rose first to show

how this was done. And then some of the younger ones, after being urged, followed example. Sobbing, they testified as to their depth of sin and their sense of forgiveness, while Brother Poole intermittently cut in with staccato exclamations such as "Praise the Lord!" and "My Redeemer Liveth!"

Missy was eager to see whether grandpa and grandma would stand up and testify. When neither of them did so, she didn't know whether she was more disappointed or relieved. Perhaps their silence denoted that their souls had been born anew quite easily. Or again—! She sighed; her soul, at all events, had proved a failure.

She was silent on the way home. Grandpa and grandma held her two hands clasped in theirs and over her head talked quietly. She was too dejected to pay much attention to what they were saying; caught only scattered, meaningless phrases: "Of course that kind of frenzy is sincere but—" "Simple young things—" "No more idea of sin or real repentance—"

But Missy was engrossed with her own dismal thoughts. The blood of the Lamb had passed her by.

And that night, for the first time in three nights, the grace of God didn't flow in on the flood of moonlight through her window. She tossed on her unhallowed pillow in troubled dreams. Once she cried out in sleep, and grandma came hurrying in with a candle. Grandma sat down beside her—what was this she was saying about "green-apple pie"? Missy wished to ask her about it—green-apple pie—green-

apple pie— Before she knew it she was off to sleep again.

It was the next morning while she was still lying in bed, that Missy made the Great Resolve. That hour is one when big Ideas—all kinds of unusual thoughts—are very apt to come. When you're not yet entirely awake; not taken up with trivial, every-day things. Your mind, then, has full swing.

Lying there in grandma's soft feather bed, Missy wasn't yet distracted by daytime affairs. She dreamily regarded the patch of blue sky showing through the window, and bits of fleecy cloud, and flying specks of far-away birds. How wonderful to be a bird and live up in the beautiful sky! When she died and became an angel, she *could* live up there! But was she sure she'd become an angel? That reflection gradually brought her thoughts to the events of the preceding night.

Though she could recall those events distinctly, Missy now saw them in a different kind of way. Now she was able to look at the evening as a whole, with herself merely a part of the whole. She regarded that sort of detached object which was herself. That detached Missy had gone to the meeting, and failed to find grace. Others had gone and found grace. Even though they had acted no differently from Missy. Like her they sang tunes; listened to the preacher; bowed the head; went forward and knelt at the feet of Jesus; repented; went back to the pews; stood up and testified—

Oh!

Suddenly Missy gave a little sound, and stirred. She puckered her brows in intense concentration. Perhaps—perhaps *that* was why!

And then she made the Great Resolve.

Soon after breakfast, Pete appeared with a bag of candy.

"I don't deserve it," said Missy humbly.

"You bet you don't!" acquiesced Pete.

So even he recognized her state of sin! Her Great Resolve intensified.

That morning, for the first time in her life at grandma's house, Missy shirked her "chores." She found paper and pencil, took a small Holy Bible, and stole back to the tool-house where grandpa kept his garden things and grandma her washtubs. For that which she now was to do, Missy would have preferred the more beautiful summerhouse at home; but grandma had no summerhouse, and this offered the only sure seclusion.

She stayed out there a long time, seated on an upturned washtub; read the Holy Bible for awhile; then became absorbed in the ecstasies of composition. So engrossed was she that she didn't at first hear grandma calling her.

Grandma was impatiently waiting on the back porch.

"What in the world are you doing out there?" she demanded.

Loath to lie, now, Missy made a compromise with her conscience.

"I was reading the Holy Bible, grandma."

Grandma's expression softened; and all she said was:

"Well, dinner's waiting, now."

Grandpa was staying down town and Pete was over at the Curriers', so there were only grandma and Missy at the table. Missy tried to attend to grandma's chatter and make the right answers in the right places. But her mind kept wandering; and once grandma caught her whispering.

"What *is* the matter with you, Missy? What are you whispering about?"

Guiltily Missy clapped her hand to her mouth.

"Oh! was I whispering?"

"Yes."

"I guess it was just a piece I'm learning."

"What piece?"

"I—I—it's going to be a surprise."

"Oh, another surprise? Well, that'll be nice," said grandma.

Missy longed acutely to be alone. It was upsetting to have to carry on a conversation. That often throws you off of what's absorbing your thoughts.

So she was glad when, after dinner, grandma said:

"I think you'd better take a little nap, dear. You don't seem quite like yourself—perhaps you'd best not attempt the meeting to-night."

That last was a bomb-shell; but Missy decided not to worry about such a possible catastrophe till the time should come. She found a chance to slip out to the tool-house and rescue the Holy Bible and

the sheet of paper, the latter now so scratched out and interlined as to be unintelligible to anyone save an author.

When at last she was alone in her room, she jumped out of bed—religion, it seems, sometimes makes deception a necessity.

For a time she worked on the paper, bending close over it, cheeks flushed, eyes shining, whispering as she scratched.

At supper, Missy was glad to learn that Pete had planned to attend the meeting that evening. "Revivals" were not exactly in Pete's line; but as long as Polly Currier had to be there, he'd decided he might as well go to see her home. Moreover, he'd persuaded several others of "the crowd" to go along and make a sort of party of it.

And Missy's strained ears caught no ominous suggestion as to her own staying at home.

Later, walking sedately to the church between her grandparents, Missy felt her heart beating so hard she feared they might hear it. Once inside the church, she drew a long breath. Oh, if only she didn't have so long to wait! How *could* she wait?

Polly Currier was again seated on the choir platform, to-night an angel in lavender mull. She had a bunch of pansies at her belt—pansies out of grandma's garden. Pete must have given them to her! She now and then smiled back toward the back pew where Pete and "the crowd" were sitting.

To Missy's delight Polly sang a solo. It was "One Sweetly Solemn Thought"—oh, rapture! Polly's

high soprano noated up clear and piercing-sweet. It was so beautiful that it hurt. Missy shut her eyes. She could almost see angels in misty white and floating golden hair. Something quivered inside her; once more on the wings of music was the religious feeling stealing back to her.

The solo was finished, but Missy kept her eyes closed whenever she thought no one was looking. She was anxious to hold the religious feeling till her soul could be entirely born anew. And she had quite a long time to wait. That made her task difficult and complicated; for it's not easy at the same time to retain an emotional state and to rehearse a piece you're afraid of forgetting.

But the service gradually wore through. Now they were at the "come forward and sit at the feet of Jesus." To-night grandpa and grandma didn't do that; they merely knelt in the pew with bowed heads. So Missy also knelt with bowed head. She was by this time in a state difficult to describe; a quivering jumble of excitement, eagerness, timidity, fear, hope, and exaltation. . . .

And now at last, was come the time!

Brother Poole, again wearing the look on his face as of an electric light turned on within, exhorted the repentant ones to "stand up and testify."

Missy couldn't bear to wait for someone else to begin. She jumped hastily to her feet. Grandma tried to pull her down. Missy frowned slightly—why was grandma tugging at her skirt? Tugging away, she extended her arms with palms flat together

and thumbs extended—one of Brother Poole's most effective gestures—and began:

"My soul rejoiceth because I have seen the light. Yea, it burns in my soul and my soul is restoreth. I will fear no evil even if it is born again. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I have been a sinner but—"

Why was grandma pulling at her skirt? Missy twitched away and, raising her voice to a higher key, went on:

"I said I've been a sinner, but I've repented my sins and want to lead a blameless life. I repent my sins—O Lord, please forgive me for being a spy-eye when Cousin Pete kissed Polly Currier, and guide me to lead a blameless life. Amen."

She sat down.

A great and heavenly stillness came and wrapped itself about her, a soft and velvety stillness; to shut out gasp or murmur or stifled titter.

The miracle had happened! It was as if an inner light had been switched on; a warm white light which tingled through to every fibre of her being. Surely this was the flame divine! It was her soul being born anew. . . .

II

"Your True Friend, Melissa M."

MISSY knew, the moment she opened her eyes, that golden June morning, that it was going to be a happy day. Missy, with Poppylinda purring beside her, found this mysterious, irradiant feeling flowing out of her heart almost as tangible as a third live being in her quaint little room. It seemed a sort of left-over, still vaguely attached, from the wonderful dream she had just been having. Trying to recall the dream, she shut her eyes again; Missy's one regret, in connection with her magical dreams, was that the sparkling essence of them was apt to become dim when she awoke. But now, when she opened her eyes, the suffusion still lingered.

For a long, quiet, blissful moment, she lay smiling at the spot where the sunlight, streaming level through the lace-curtained window, fell on the rose-flowered chintz of the valances. Missy liked those colours very much; then her eyes followed the beam of light to where it spun a prism of fairy colours on the mirror above the high-boy, and she liked that ecstatically. She liked, too, by merely turning her head on the pillow, to glimpse, through the parting of the curtains, the ocean of blue sky with its flying

cloud ships, so strange; and to hear the morning song of the birds and the happy hum of insects, the music seeming almost to filter through the lace curtains in a frescoed pattern which glided, alive, along the golden roadway of sunshine. She even liked the monotonous metallic rattle which betold that old Jeff was already at work with the lawn-mower.

All this in a silent moment crammed to the full with vibrant ecstasy; then Missy remembered, specifically, the Wedding drawing every day nearer, and the new Pink Dress, and the glory to be hers when she should strew flowers from a huge leghorn hat, and her rapture brimmed over. Physically and spiritually unable to keep still another second, she suddenly sat up.

"Oh, Poppylinda!" she whispered. "I'm so happy—so happy!"

Everyone knows—that is, everyone who knows kittens—that kittens, like babies, listen with their eyes. To Missy's whispered confidence, Poppylinda, without stirring, opened her lids and blinked her yellow eyes.

"Aren't you happy, too? *Say* you're happy, Poppy, darling!"

Poppy was stirred to such depths that mere eye-blinking could not express her emotion. She opened her mouth, so as to expose completely her tiny red tongue, and then, without lingual endeavour, began to hum a gentle, crooning rumble down somewhere near her stomach. Yes; Poppy was happy.

The spirit of thanksgiving glamorously enwrapped

these two all the time Missy was dressing. Like the efficient big girl of twelve that she was, Missy drew her own bath and, later, braided her own hair neatly. As she tied the ribbons on those braids, now crossed in a "coronet" over her head, she gave the ghost of a sigh. This morning she didn't want to wear her every-day bows; but dutifully she tied them on, a big brown cabbage above each ear. When she had scrambled into her checked gingham "sailor suit," all spick and span, Missy stood eying herself in the mirror for a wistful moment, wishing her tight braids might metamorphose into lovely, hanging curls like Kitty Allen's. They come often to a "strange child"—these moments of vague longing to overhear one's self termed a "pretty child"—especially on the eve of an important occasion.

But thoughts of that important occasion speedily chased away consciousness of self. And downstairs in the cheerful dining room, with the family all gathered round the table, Missy, her cheeks glowing pink and her big grey eyes ashine, found it difficult to eat her oatmeal, for very rapture. In the bay window, the geraniums on the sill nodded their great, blossomy heads at her knowingly. Beyond, the big maple was stirring its leaves, silver side up, like music in the breeze. Away across the yard, somewhere, Jeff was making those busy, restful sounds with the lawn-mower. These alluring things, and others stretching out to vast mental distances, quite deadened, for Missy, the family's talk close at hand.

"When I ran over to the Greenleaf's to borrow the sugar," Aunt Nettie was saying, "May White was there, and she and Helen hurried out of the dining room when they saw me. I'm *sure* they'd been crying, and—"

"S-sh!" warned Mrs. Merriam, with a glance toward Missy. Then, in a louder tone: "Eat your cereal, Missy. Why are you letting it get cold?"

Missy brought her eyes back from space with an answering smile. "I was thinking," she explained.

"What of, Missy?" This, encouragingly, from father.

"Oh, my dream, last night."

"What did you dream about?"

"Oh—mountains," replied Missy, somewhat vaguely.

"For the land's sake!" exclaimed Aunt Nettie. "What ever put such a thing into her head? She never saw a mountain in her life!" Grown-ups have a disconcerting way of speaking of children, even when present, in the third person. But Aunt Nettie finally turned to Missy with a direct (and dreaded): "What did they look like, Missy?"

"Oh—mountains," returned Missy, still vague.

At a sign from mother, the others did not press her further. When she had finished her breakfast, Missy approached her mother, and the latter, reading the question in her eyes, asked:

"Well, what is it, Missy?"

"I feel—like pink to-day," faltered Missy, half-embarrassed.

But her mother did not ask for explanation. She only pondered a moment.

"You know," reminded the supplicant, "I have to try on the Pink Dress this morning."

"Very well, then," granted mother. "But only the second-best ones."

Missy's face brightened and she made for the door.

Before she got altogether out of earshot, Aunt Nettie began: "I don't know that it's wise to humour her in her notions. '*Feel* like pink!'—what in the world does she mean by that?"

Missy was glad the question had not been put to her; for, to have saved her life, she couldn't have answered it intelligibly. She was out of hearing too soon to catch her mother's answer:

"She's just worked up over the wedding, and being a flower-girl and all."

"Well, I don't believe," stated Aunt Nettie with the assurance that spinsters are wont to show in discussing such matters, "that it's good for children to let them work themselves up that way. She'll be as much upset as the bridegroom if Helen *does* back out."

"Oh, I don't think old Mrs. Greenleaf would ever let her break it off, *now*," said Mrs. Merriam, stooping to pick up the papers which her husband had left strewn over the floor.

"She's hard as rocks," agreed Aunt Nettie.

"Though," Mrs. Merriam went on, "when it's a question of her daughter's happiness—"

"A little unhappiness would serve Helen Green-

leaf right," commented the other tartly. "She's spoiled to death and a flirt. *I* think it was a lucky day for young Doc Alison when she jilted him."

"She's just young and vain," championed Mrs. Merriam, carefully folding the papers and laying them in the rack. "Any pretty girl in Helen's position couldn't help being spoiled. And you must admit nothing's ever turned her head—Europe, or her visits to Cleveland, or anything."

"The Cleveland man *is* handsome," said Aunt Nettie irrelevantly—the Cleveland man was the bridegroom-elect.

"Yes, in a stylish, sporty kind of way. But I don't know—" She hesitated a moment, then concluded: "Missy doesn't like him."

At that Aunt Nettie laughed with genuine mirth. "What on earth do you think a child would know about it?" she ridiculed.

Meanwhile the child, whose departure had thus loosed free speech, was leagues distant from the gossip and the unrest which was its source. Her pink hair bows, even the second-best ones, lifted her to a state which made it much pleasanter to idle in her window, sniffing at the honey-suckle, than to hurry down to the piano. She longed to make up something which, like a tune of water rippling over pink pebbles, was running through her head. But faithfully, at last, she toiled through her hour, and then was called on to mind the Baby.

This last duty was a real pleasure. For she could wheel the perambulator off to the summerhouse, in

a secluded, sweet-smelling corner of the yard, and there recite poetry aloud. To reinforce those verses she knew by heart, she carried along the big Anthology which, in its old-blue binding, contrasted so satisfyingly with the mahogany table in the sitting-room. The first thing she read was "Before the Beginning of Years" from "Atalanta in Calydon"; Missy especially adored Swinburne—so liltingly incomprehensible.

The performance, as ever, was highly successful all around. Baby really enjoyed it and Poppylinda as well, both of them blinking in placid appreciation. And as for Missy, the liquid sound of the metres rolling off her own lips, the phrases so beautiful and so "deep," seemed to lift a choking something right up into her throat until she could have wept with the sweet pain of it. She did, as a matter of fact—happy tears, about which her two auditors asked no embarrassing question. Baby merely gurgled, and Poppylinda essayed to climb the declaimer's skirts.

"Sit down, sad Soul!" Missy's mood could no longer even attempt to mate with prose. She turned through the pages of the Anthology until she came to another favourite:

> *So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,*
> *There never was knight like young Lochinvar.*

This she read through, with a fine, swinging rhythm.

"I think that last stanza's perfectly *exquisite*—don't you?" Missy enquired of her mute audience. And she repeated it, as unctuously as though she were the poet herself.

Then, quite naturally, this romance recalled to her the romance next door, so deliciously absorbing her waking and dreaming hours—the romance of her own Miss Princess. Miss Princess—Missy's more formal adaptation of Young Doc's soubriquet for Helen Greenleaf in the days of *his* romance—was the most beautiful heroine imaginable. And the Wedding was next week, and Missy was to walk first of all the six flower-girls, and the Pink Dress was all but done, and the Pink Stockings—silk!—were upstairs in the third drawer of the high-boy! Oh, it was a golden world, radiant with joy. Of course—it's only earth, after all, and not heaven—she'd *rather* the bridegroom was going to be young Doc. But Miss Princess had arranged it this other way—*her* bridegroom had come out of the East. And the Wedding was almost here! . . . There never was morning so fair, nor grass so vivid and shiny, nor air so soft. Above her head the cherry-buds were swelling, almost ready to burst. From the open windows of the house, down the street, sounds from a patient piano, flattered by distance, betokened that Kitty Allen was struggling with "Perpetual Motion"; Missy, who had finished her struggles with that abomination-to-beginners a month previously, felt her sense of beatitude deepen.

Presently into this Elysium floated her mother's voice, summoning her to the house. Rounding the corner of the back walk with the perambulator, she collided with the grocer-boy. He was a nice-mannered boy, picking up the Anthology and Baby's

doll from the ground, and handing them to her with a charming smile. Besides, he had very bright, sparkling eyes. Missy fancied he must be some lost Prince, and inwardly resolved to make up, as soon as alone, a story to this effect.

In the house, mother told her it was time to go to Miss Martin's to try on the Pink Dress.

Down the street, she encountered Mr. Hackett, the rich bridegroom come out of the East, a striking figure, on that quiet street, in the natty white flannels suggesting Cleveland, Atlantic City, and other foreign places.

"Well, if here isn't Sappho!" he greeted her gaily.

Missy blushed. Not for worlds had she suspected he was hearing her, that unlucky morning in the grape-arbour, when she recited her latest Poem to Miss Princess. Now she smiled perfunctorily, and started to pass him.

But Mr. Hackett, swinging his stick, stood with his feet wide apart and looked down at her.

"How's the priestess of song, this fine morning?" he persisted.

"All-right," stammered Missy.

He laughed, as if actually enjoying her confusion. Missy observed that his eyes were red-rimmed, and his face a pasty white. She wondered whether he was sick; but he jauntily waved his stick at her and went on his way.

Missy, a trifle subdued, continued hers.

But oh, it is a wonderful world! You never know what any moment may bring you. Adventures,

fairy-sent surprises, await you at the most unexpected turns, spring at you from around the first corner.

It was around the very first corner, in truth, that Missy met young Doc Alison, buzzing leisurely along in his Ford.

"Hello, Missy," he greeted. "Like a lift?"

Missy would. Young Doc jumped out, and, in a deferential manner she admired very much, assisted her into the little car as though she were a grown-up and lovely young lady. Young Doc was a nice man. She knew him well. He had felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, sent her Valentines, taken her riding, and shown her many other little courtesies for as far back as she could remember. Then, too, she greatly admired his looks. He was tall and lean and wiry. His face was given to quick flashes of smiling; and his eyes could be dreamy or luminous. He resembled, Missy now decided—and marvelled she hadn't noticed it before—that other young man, Lochinvar, "so faithful in love and so dauntless in war."

When young Doc politely enquired whether she could steal enough time from her errand to turn about for a run up "The Boulevard," Missy acquiesced. She regretted she hadn't worn her shirred mull hat. But she decided not to worry about that. After all, her appearance, at the present moment, didn't so much matter. What did matter was the way she was going to look next Wednesday—and she excitedly began telling young Doc about her coming magnificence.

"It's *silk* organdie," she said in a reverent tone, "and has *garlands* of rosebuds." She went on and told him of the big leghorn hat to be filled with flowers, of the Pink Stockings—best of all, silk!—waiting, in tissue-paper, in the high-boy drawer.

"Oh, I can hardly wait!" she concluded rapturously.

Young Doc, guiding the car around the street-sprinkling wagon, did not answer. Beyond the wagon, Mr. Hackett, whom the Ford had overtaken, was swinging along. Missy turned to young Doc with a slight grimace.

"'The poor craven bridegroom said never a word,'" she quoted.

Young Doc permitted himself to smile—not too much. "Why don't you like him, Missy?"

Missy shook her head, without other reply. It would have been difficult for her to express why she didn't like stylish Mr. Hackett.

"I wish," she said suddenly, "that *you* were going to be the bridegroom, Doc."

He smiled a wry smile at her. "Well, to tell the truth, I wish so, too, Missy."

"Well, she'll be coming back to visit us often, and maybe you can take us out riding again."

"Maybe—but after getting used to big imported cars, I'm afraid one doesn't care much for a Ford."

There was a note of cynicism, of pain, which, because she didn't know what it was, cut Missy to the heart. It is all very well, in Romance and Poems, to meet with unhappy, discarded lovers—they played

an essential part in many of the best ballads in the Anthology; but when that romantic rôle falls, in real life, on the shoulders of a nice young Doc, the matter assumes a different complexion. Missy's own ecstasy over the Wedding suddenly loomed thoughtless, selfish, wicked. She longed timidly to reach over and pat that lean brown hand resting on the steering-wheel. Two sentences she formed in her mind, only to abandon them unspoken, when, to her relief, the need for delicate diplomacy was temporarily removed by the car's slowing to a stop before Miss Martin's gate.

Inside the little white cottage, however, in Miss Martin's sitting-room—so queer and fascinating with its "forms," its samples and "trimmings" pinned to the curtains, its alluring display of fashion magazines and "charts," and its eternal litter of varicoloured scraps over the floor—Missy's momentary dejection could but vanish. Finally, when in Miss Martin's artfully tilted cheval glass, she surveyed the pink vision which was herself, gone, for the time, was everything of sadness in the world. She turned her head this way and that, craning to get the effect from every angle—the bouffance of the skirt, the rosebuds wreathing the sides, the butterfly sash in the back. Adjured by Miss Martin to stand still, she stood vibrantly poised like a lily-stem waiting the breath of the wind; bade to "lift up your arms," she obeyed and visioned winged fairies alert for flight. Even when Miss Martin, carried away by her zeal in fitting, stuck a pin through the pink tis-

sue clear into the warmer, softer pink beneath, Missy scarcely felt the prick.

But, at the midday dinner-table, that sympathetic uneasiness returned. Father, home from the office, was full of indignation over something "disgraceful" he had heard down town. Though the conversation was held tantalizingly above Missy's full comprehension, she could gather that the "disgrace" centred in the bachelor dinner which Mr. Hackett had given at the Commercial House the night before. Father evidently held no high opinion of the introduction of "rotten Cleveland performances" nor of the man who had introduced them.

"What 'rotten Cleveland performances'?" asked Missy with lively curiosity.

"Oh, just those late, indigestible suppers," cut in mother quickly. "Rich food at that hour just kills your stomach. Here, don't you want another strawberry tart, Missy?"

Missy didn't; but she affected a desire for it, and then a keen interest in its consumption. By this artifice, she hoped she might efface herself as a hindrance to continuation of the absorbing talk. But it is a trick of grown-ups to stop dead at the most thrilling points; though she consumed the last crumb of the tart, her ears gained no reward, until mother said:

"As soon as you've finished dinner, Missy, I wish you'd run over to Greenleafs' and ask to borrow Miss Helen's new kimono pattern."

Missy brightened. The sight of old Mrs. Green-

leaf and Miss Princess, bustling gaily about, would lift this strange cloud gathering so ominously. She asked permission to carry along a bunch of sweet peas, and gathered the kind Miss Princess liked best —pinkish lavender blossoms, a delicious colour like the very fringe of a rainbow.

The Greenleafs' coloured maid let her in and showed her into the "den" back of the parlour. "I'll tell Mrs. Greenleaf," she said. "They're all busy upstairs."

Very busy they must have been, for Missy had restlessly dangled her feet for what seemed hours, before she heard voices approaching the parlour.

"Oh, I won't—I won't—" It was Miss Princess's voice, almost unrecognizably high and quavering.

"Now, just listen a minute, darling—" This unmistakably Mr. Hackett's languorous, curiously repellent monotone.

"Don't you *touch* me!"

Missy, stricken by the knowledge she was eavesdropping, peered about for a means of slipping out. But the only door, portière-hung, was the one leading into the parlour. And now this concealed poor blundering Missy from the speakers while it allowed their talk to drift through.

That talk, stormy and utterly incomprehensible, filled the child with a growing sense of terror. Accusations, quick pleadings, angry retorts, attempts at explanation, all formed a dreadful muttering background out of which shot, like sharp streaks of lightning, occasional clearly-caught phrases: "Charlie

White came home dead drunk, I tell you—" "—You know I'm mad about you, Helen, or I wouldn't—" "—Oh, don't you *touch* me!"

To Missy, trapped and shaking with panic, the storm seemed to have raged hours before she detected a third voice, old Mrs. Greenleaf's, which cut calm and controlled across the area of passion.

"You'd better go out a little while, Porter, and let me talk to her."

Then another interminable stretch of turmoil, this all the more terrifying because less violent.

"Oh, mother—I *can't*—" Anger, spent, had given way to broken sobbing.

"I understand how you feel, dear. But you'll—"

"I despise him!"

"I understand, dear. All girls get frightened and—"

"But it isn't that, mother. I don't love him. I *can't* go on. Won't *you*, this minute, tell him—tell everybody—?"

"Darling, don't you realize I can't?" Missy had never before heard old Mrs. Greenleaf's voice tremble. "The invitation, and the trousseau, and the presents, and everything. Think of the scandal, dear. We *couldn't*. Don't you see, dear, we can't back out, *now?*"

"O-o-oh."

"I almost wish—but don't you see—?"

"Oh, I can't stand it another *hour!*"

"You're excited, dear," soothingly. "You'd better go rest a while. I'll have a good talk with

Porter. And you go upstairs and lie down. The Carrolls' dinner—"

"Oh, dinners, luncheons, clothes. I—"

The despairing sound of Miss Princess's cry, and the throbbing realization that these were calamities she must not overhear, stung Missy to renewed reconnoitring. Tiptoeing over to the window, she fumbled at the fastening of the screen, swung it outward, and, contemplating a jump to the sward below, thrust one foot over the sill.

"Hello, there! What are *you* up to?"

On the side porch, not twenty feet away, Mr. Hackett was regarding her with amazed and hostile eyes. Missy's heart thumped against her ribs. Her consternation was not lessened when, tossing away his cigarette with a vindictive gesture, he added: "Stay where you are!"

Missy slackened her hold and crouched back like a hunted criminal. And like a hunted criminal he condemned her, a moment later, to old Mrs. Greenleaf.

"That kid from next door has been snooping in here. I caught her trying to sneak out."

Missy faltered out her explanation.

"I know it wasn't your fault, dear," said old Mrs. Greenleaf kindly. "What was it you wanted?"

Her errand forgotten, Missy could only attempt a smile and dumbly extend the bouquet.

Old Mrs. Greenleaf took the flowers, then spoke over her shoulder: "I think Helen wants you upstairs, Porter."

Missy had always thought she was like a Roman Matron; now it was upsetting to see the Roman Matron so upset.

"Miss Helen's got a terrible headache and is lying down," said old Mrs. Greenleaf, fussing over the flowers.

"Oh," said Missy, desperately tongue-tied and ill-at-ease.

For a long second it endured portentously still in the room and in the world without; then like a sharp thunder-clap out of a summer sky, a door slammed upstairs. There was a sound of someone running down the steps, and Missy glimpsed Mr. Hackett going out the front door, banging the screen after him.

At the last noise, old Mrs. Greenleaf's shoulders stiffened as if under a lash. But she turned quietly and said:

"Thank you so much for the flowers, Missy. I'll give them to her after a while, when she's better. And you can see her to-morrow."

It was the politest of dismissals. Missy, having remembered the pattern, hurriedly got it and ran home. She had seen a suspicion of tears in old Mrs. Greenleaf's eyes. It was as upsetting as though the bronze Wingèd Victory on the parlour mantel should begin to weep.

All that afternoon Missy sought solitude. She refused to play croquet with Kitty Allen when that beautiful and most envied friend appeared. When Kitty took herself home, offended, Missy went out to the remote summerhouse, relieved.

She looked back, now, on her morning's careless happiness as an old man looks back on the heyday of his youth.

Heavy with sympathy, non-comprehension and fear, she brooded over these dark, mysterious hints about the handsome Cleveland man; over young Doc's blighted love; over Miss Princess's wanting to "back out"; over old Mrs. Greenleaf's strange, dominant "pride."

Why did Miss Princess want to "back out"?—Miss Princess with her beautiful coppery hair, and eager parted lips, and eyes of mysterious purple (Missy lingered on the reflection "eyes of mysterious purple" long enough to foreshadow a future poem including that line). Was it because she still loved Doc? If so, why didn't it turn out all right, since Doc loved her, too? Surely that would be better, since there seemed to be something wrong with Mr. Hackett—even though everybody did talk about what a wonderful match he was. Then they talked about invitations and things as though old Mrs. Greenleaf thought those things counted for more than the bridegroom. Old Mrs. Greenleaf, Missy was sure, loved Miss Princess better than anything else in the world; then *how* could she, even if she was "proud," twist things so foolishly?

She had brought with her the blue-bound Anthology and a writing-pad and pencil. First she read a little—"Lochinvar" it was she opened to. Then she meditated. Poor Young Doc! The whole unhappy situation was like poetry. (So much in life she was

finding, these days, like poetry.) This would make a very sad, but effective poem: the faithful, unhappy lover, the lovely, unhappy bride, the mother keeping them asunder who, though stern, was herself unhappy, and the craven bridegroom who—she hoped it, anyway!—was unhappy also.

In all this unhappiness, though she didn't suspect it, Missy revelled—a peculiar kind of melancholy tuned to the golden day. She detected a subtle restlessness in the shimmering leaves about her; the scent of the June roses caught at something elusively sad in her. Without knowing why, her eyes filled with tears.

She drew the writing-pad to her; conjured the vision of nice Doc and of Miss Princess, and, immersed in a sea of feeling, sought for words and rhyme:

> O, young Doctor Al is the pride of the West,
> Than big flashy autos his Ford is the best;
> Ah! courtly that lover and faithful and true,
> And fair, wondrous fair, the maiden was, too.
> But O—dire the day! when from Cleveland afar—

A long pause here: "car," "scar," "jar,"—all tried and discarded. Finally sense, rhyme and meter were attuned:

> —afar,
> A dastard she met, their sweet idyl to mar.
>
> He won her away with his glitter and plume
> And citified ways, while the lover did fume.
> O, fair dawned the Wedding Day, pink in the East,
> And folk from all quarters did come for the feast;
> Gay banners from turrets—

"Missy!"

The poet, head bent, absorbed in creation, did not hear.

"Missy! Where *are* you? Me-*lis*-sa!"

This time the voice cleaved into the mood of inspiration. With a sigh Missy put the pad and pencil in the Anthology, laid the whole on the bench, and obediently went to mind the Baby. But, as she wheeled the perambulator up and down the front walk, her mind liltingly repeated the words she had written, and she stepped along in time to the rhythm. It was a fine rhythm. And, as soon as she was relieved from duty, she rushed back to the temporary shrine of the Muse. The words, now, flowed much more easily than at the beginning—one of the first lessons learned by all creative artists.

Gay banners from turrets streamed out in the air
And all Maple Avenue turned out for the pair.
Ah! beauteous was she, that white-satin young bride,
But sorrow had reddened her deep purple eyes.
Each clatter of hoofs from the courtyard below
Did summon the blood swift to ebb and then flow;
For the gem on her finger, the flower in her hair,
Bound not her sad heart to that Cleveland man there.

Ah! who is this riding so fast through Main Street?
The gallant young lover—

Again, reiterant and increasingly imperative, summons from the house slashed across her mood. Can't one's family *ever* appreciate the yearning for solitude? However, even amid the talkative circle round the supper-table, Missy felt uplifted and strangely remote.

"Why aren't you eating your supper, Missy? Just look at that wasted good meat!"

"Meat," though a good rhyme for "street,' would not work well. "Neat"—"fleet"— Ah! "Fleet!"

Immediately after supper, followed by the inquisitive Poppylinda, Missy took her poem out to the comparative solitude of the back porch steps. It was very sweet and still out there, the sun sinking blood-red over the cherry trees. With no difficulty at all, she went on, inspired:

—Main Street?
The gallant young Doctor in his motor so fleet!
So flashing his eye and so stately his form
That the bride's sinking heart with delight did grow warm.
But the poor craven bridegroom said never a word;
And the parent so proud did champ in her woe.

The knight snatched her swiftly into the Ford,
And she smiled as he steered adown the Boulevard;
Then away they did race until soon lost to view,
And all knew 'twas best for these lovers so true.
For where, tell me where, would have gone that bride's bliss?
Who flouts at true love all true happiness must miss!

What matters the vain things of Earth, soon or late,
If the heart of a loved one in anguish doth break?

When she came to the triumphant close, among the fragrant cherry blooms the birds were twittering their lullabies. She went in to say her own good night, the Poem, much erased and interlined, tucked in the front of her blouse together with ineffable sensations. But she was not, for all that, beyond a certain concern for material details.

"Mother, may I do my hair up in kid-curlers?" she asked.

"Why, this is only Wednesday." Mother's tone connoted the fact that "waves," rippling artificially either side of Missy's "part" down to her two braids, achieved a decorative effect reserved for Sundays and special events. Then quickly, perhaps because she hadn't been altogether unaware of this last visitation of the Heavenly Muse, she added: "Well, I don't care. Do it up, if you want to."

Then, moved by some motive of her own, she followed Missy upstairs to do it up herself. These occasions of personal service were rare, these days, since Missy had grown big and efficient, and were therefore deeply cherished. But to-night Missy almost regretted her mother's unexpected ministration; for the paper in her blouse crackled at unwary gestures, and if mother should protract her stay throughout the undressing period, there might come an awkward call for explanations.

And mother, innocently, added one more element to her entangled burden of distress.

"We'll do it up all over your head, for the Wedding," she said, gently brushing the full length of the fine, silvery-brown strands. "And let it hang in loose curls."

At the conjectured vision, Missy's eyes began to sparkle.

"And I think a ribbon band the colour of your dress would be pretty," mother went on, parting off a section and wrapping it round a "curler."

A sudden remembrance clutched at Missy's ecstatic reply; the shine faded from her eyes. But mother, engrossed, didn't observe; more deeply she sank her unintentional barb. "No," she mused aloud, "a garland of little rosebuds would be better, I believe—tiny delicate little buds, tied with a pink bow."

At that, the prospective flower-girl, to have saved her life, could not have repressed the sigh which rose like a tidal wave from her overcharged heart. Mother caught the sigh, and looked at her anxiously. "Don't you think it would look pretty?" she asked.

Missy nodded mutely. So complex were her emotions that, fearing for self-control, she was glad, just then, that the Baby cried.

As soon as mother had kissed her good night and left her, she pulled out the paper rustling importantly within her blouse, and laid it in the celluloid "treasure box" which sat on the high-boy. Then soberly she finished the operation on her hair, and undressed herself.

Before getting into bed, after her regular prayer was said, she stayed awhile on her knees and put the whole of her seething dilemma before God. "Dear God," she said, "you know how unhappy Miss Princess is and young Doc, too. Please make them both happy, God. And please help me not feel sorry about the Pink Dress. For I just can't help feeling sorry. Please help us all, dear God, and I'll be such a good girl, God."

Perhaps it is the biggest gift in the world to be

able to pray. And, by prayer, is not meant the saying over of a formal code, but the simple, direct speaking with God. It is so simple in the doing, so marvellous in its reaction, that the strange thing is that it is not more generally practiced. But *there* is where the gift comes in: a supreme essence of spirit which must, if the prayer is to achieve its end, be first possessed—a thing possessed by all children not yet quite rid of the glamour of immortality and by some, older, who contrive to hold enough glamour to be as children throughout life. Some call this thing Faith, but there are other names just as good; and the essence lives on forever.

These reflections are not Missy's. She knelt there, without consciousness of any motive or analysis. She only knew she was telling it all to God. And presently, in her heart, in whispers fainter than the stir of the slumbering leaves outside, she heard His answer. God had heard; she knew it by the peace He laid upon her tumultuous heart.

Steeped in faith, she fell asleep. But not a dreamless sleep. Missy always dreamed, these nights: wonderful dreams — magical, splendid, sometimes vaguely terrifying, often remotely tied up with some event of the day, but always wonderful. And the last dream she dreamed, this eventful night, was marvellous indeed. For it was a replica of the one she had dreamed the night before.

It was an omen of divine portent. No one could have doubted it. Missy, waking from its subtle glamour to the full sunlight streaming across her

pillow, hugged Poppylinda, crooned over her and, though preparing to sacrifice that golden something whose prospect had gilded her life, sang her way through the duties of her toilet.

That accomplished, she lifted out her Poem, and wrote at the bottom: "Your true friend, MELISSA M."

Then she tucked the two sheets in her blouse, and scrambled downstairs to be chided again for not eating her breakfast.

After the last spoonful, obligatory and arduous, had been disposed of, she loitered near the hall telephone until there was a clear field, then called Young Doc's number. What a relief to find he had not yet gone out! Could he stop by her house, pretty soon? Why, what was the matter—Doc's voice was alarmed —someone sick?

"No, but it's something *very* important, Doc." Missy's manner was hurried and impressive.

"Won't it wait?"

"It's *terribly* important."

"What is it? Can't you tell me now, Missy?"

"No—it's a secret. And I've got to hurry up now and hang up the phone *because* it's a secret."

"I see. All right, I'll be along in about fifteen minutes. What do you want me to—"

"Stop by the summerhouse," she cut in nervously. "I'll be there."

It seemed a long time, but in reality was shorter than schedule, before Young Doc's car appeared up the side street. He brought it to a stop opposite the

summerhouse, jumped out and approached the rendezvous.

Summoning all her courage, she held the Poem ready in her hand.

"Good morning, Missy," he sang out. "What's all the mystery?"

For answer Missy could only smile—a smile made wan by nervousness—and extend the two crumpled sheets of paper.

Young Doc took them curiously, smiled at the primly-lettered, downhill lines, and then narrowed his eyes to skimming absorption. A strange expression gathered upon his face as he read. Missy didn't know exactly what to make of his working muscles —whether he was pained or angry or amused. But she was entirely unprepared for the fervour with which, when he finished, he seized her by the shoulders and bounced her up and down.

"Did you make all this up?" he cried. "Or do you mean she really doesn't want to marry that bounder?"

"She really doesn't," answered Missy, not too engaged in steeling herself against his crunching of her shoulder bones to register the soubriquet, "bounder."

"Are you *sure* you didn't make *most* of it up?" Young Doc knew well Missy's strain of romanticism. But she strove to convince him that, for once, she was by way of being a realist.

"She *despises* him. She can't bear to go on with it. She can't stand it another *hour*. I heard her say so myself."

Young Doc, crunching her shoulder bones worse than ever, breathed hard, but said nothing. Missy proffered bashfully:

"I think, maybe, she wants to marry *you*, Doc."

Young Doc then, just at the moment she couldn't have borne the vise a second longer, let go her shoulders, and smiled a smile which, for her, would have eased a splintered bone itself.

"We'll quickly find that out," he said, and his voice was more buoyant than she had heard it in months. "Missy, do you think you could get a note to her right away?"

Missy nodded eagerly.

He scribbled the note on the back of a letter and folded it with the Poem in the used envelope. "There won't be any answer," he directed Missy, "unless she brings it herself. Just get it to her without anyone's seeing."

Missy nodded again, vibrant with repressed excitement. "I'll just pretend it's a secret about a poem. Miss Princess always helps make secrets about poems."

Evidently Miss Princess did so this time. For, after an eternity of ten minutes, Young Doc, peering through the leaves of the summerhouse, saw Missy and her convoy coming across the lawn. Missy was walking along very solemnly, with only an occasional skip to betray the ebullition within her.

But it was on the tall girl that Young Doc's gaze was riveted, the slender graceful figure which, for all

its loveliness, had something pathetically drooping about it—like a lily with a storm-bruised stem.

Something in Young Doc's throat clicked, and every last trace of resentment and wounded pride magically dissolved. He went straight to her in the doorway, and for a moment they stood there as if forgetful of everyone else in the world. Neither spoke, as is the way of those whose minds and hearts are full of inarticulate things. Then it was Doc who broke the silence.

"By the way, Missy," he said in quite an ordinary tone, "there are some of those sugar pills in a bag out in the Ford. You'll find them tucked in a corner of the seat."

Obediently Missy departed to get the treat. And when she returned, not too quickly, Miss Princess was laughing and crying both at once, and Young Doc was openly squeezing both her hands.

"Missy," he hailed, "run in and ask your mother if you can go for a ride. Needn't mention Miss Princess is going along."

O, it is a wonderful world! Swiftly back at the trysting place with the necessary permission, tucked into the Ford between the two happy lovers, "away they did race until soon lost to view."

And exactly the same happy purpose as that in the Poem! For, half-way down the stretch of Boulevard, Miss Princess squeezed her hand and said:

"We're going over to Somerville, darling, to be married, and *you're* to be one of the witnesses."

Missy's heart surged with delight—O, it was a

wonderful world! Then a dart of remembrance came, and a big tear spilled out and ran down her cheek. Miss Princess, in the midst of a laugh, looked down and spied it.

"Why, darling, what is it?" she cried anxiously.

"My Pink Dress—I just happened to think of it. But it doesn't really make any difference." However Missy's eyes were wet and shining with an emotion she couldn't quite control.

With eyes which were shining with many emotions, the man and girl, over her head, regarded each other. It was the man who spoke first, slowing down the car as he did so.

"Don't you think we'd better run back to Miss Martin's and get it?"

For answer, his sweetheart leaned across Missy and kissed him.

A fifteen minutes' delay, and again the Ford was headed towards Somerville and the County Courthouse; but now an additional passenger, a big brown box, was hugged between Missy's knees. In the County Courthouse she did not forget to guard this box tenderly all the time Young Doc and Miss Princess were scurrying around musty offices, interviewing important, shirt-sleeved men, and signing papers—not even when she herself was permitted to sign her name to an imposing document, "just for luck," as Doc laughingly said.

Then he bent his head to hear what Miss Princess wanted to whisper to him, and they both laughed some more; and then he said something to the shirt-

sleeved men, and *they* laughed; and then—O, it is a wonderful world!—Miss Princess took her into a dusty, paper-littered inner office, lifted the Pink Dress out of the box, dressed Missy up in it, fluffed out the "wave" in her front hair, and exclaimed that she was the loveliest little flower-girl in the whole world.

"Even without the flower-hat and the pink stockings?"

"Even without the flower-hat and the pink stockings," said Miss Princess with such assurance that Missy cast off doubt forever.

After the Wedding—and never in Romance was such a gay, laughing Wedding—when again they were all packed in the Ford, Missy gave a contented sigh.

"I kind of knew it," she confided. "For I dreamed it *all*, two nights running. Both times I had on the Pink Dress, and both times it was *Doc*. I'm so happy it's Doc."

And over her head the other two looked in each other's eyes.

III

Like a Singing Bird

SHE was fourteen, going on fifteen; and the world was a fascinating place. There were people who found Cherryvale a dull, poky little town to live in, but not Melissa. Not even in winter, when school and lessons took up so much time that it almost shut out reading and the wonderful dreams which reading is bound to bring you. Yet even school—especially high school the first year—was interesting. The more so when there was a teacher like Miss Smith, who looked too pretty to know so much about algebra and who was said to get a letter every day from a lieutenant—in the Philippines! Then there was ancient history, full of things fascinating enough to make up for algebra and physics. But even physics becomes suddenly thrilling at times. And always literature! Of course "grades" were bothersome, and sometimes you hated to show your monthly report to your parents, who seemed to set so much store by it; and sometimes you almost envied Beulah Crosswhite, who always got an A and who could ask questions which disconcerted even the teachers.

Yes, even school was interesting. However, summertime was best, although then you must practice

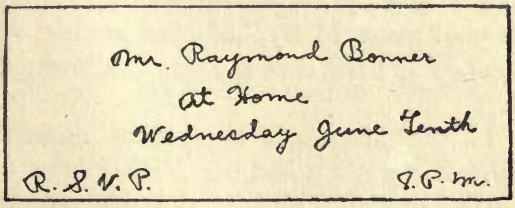
your music lesson two hours instead of one a day, dust the sitting room, and mind the baby. But you could spend long, long hours in the summerhouse, reading poetry out of the big Anthology and—this a secret—writing poetry yourself! It was heavenly to write poetry. Something soft and warm seemed to ooze through your being as you sat out there and watched the sorrow of a drab, drab sky; or else, on a bright day, a big shining cloud aloft like some silver-gold fairy palace and, down below, the smell of warm, new-cut grass, and whispers of little live things everywhere! It was then that you felt you'd have *died* if you couldn't have written poetry!

It was on such a lilting day of June, and Melissa's whole being in tune with it, that she was called in to the midday dinner—and received the invitation.

Father had brought it from the post office and handed it to her with exaggerated solemnity.

"For Miss Melissa Merriam," he announced.

Yes! there was her name on the tiny envelope. And, on the tiny card within, written in a painstaking, cramped hand:



With her whole soul in her mouth, which made it quite impossible to speak, she passed the card to her

mother and waited. "Oh," said mother, "an evening party."

Melissa's soul dropped a trifle: it still clogged her throat, but she was able to form words.

"Oh, mother!"

"You *know* you're not to ask to go to evening parties, Missy." Mother's tone was as firm as doom.

Missy turned her eyes to father.

"Don't look at me with those big saucers!" he smiled. "Mother's the judge."

So Missy turned her eyes back again. "Mother, *please*—"

But mother shook her head. "You're too young to begin such things, Missy. I don't know what this town's coming to—mere babies running round at night, playing cards and dancing!"

"But, mother—"

"Don't start teasing, Missy. It won't do any good."

So Missy didn't start teasing, but her soul remained choking in her throat. It made it difficult for her to swallow, and nothing tasted good, though they had lamb chops, which she adored.

"Eat your meat, Missy," adjured mother. Missy tried to obey and felt that she was swallowing lumps of lead.

But in the afternoon everything miraculously changed. Kitty Allen and her mother came to call. Kitty was her chum, and lived in the next block, up the hill. Kitty was beautiful, with long curls which showed golden glints in the sun. She had a

whim that she and Missy, sometimes, should have dresses made exactly alike—for instance, this summer, their best dresses of pink dotted mull. Missy tried to enjoy the whim with Kitty, but she couldn't help feeling sad at seeing how much prettier Kitty could look in the same dress. If only *she* had gold-threaded curls!

During the call the party at the Bonners' was mentioned. Mrs. Allen was going to "assist" Mrs. Bonner. She suggested that Missy might accompany Kitty and herself.

"I hadn't thought of letting Missy go," said Mrs. Merriam. "She seems so young to start going out evenings that way."

"I know just how you feel," replied Mrs. Allen. "I feel just the same way. But as long as I've got to assist, I'm willing Kitty should go this time; and I thought you mightn't object to Missy's going along with us."

"Oh, *mother!*" Missy's tone was a prayer.

And her mother, smiling toward her a charming, tolerant smile as if to say: "Well, what can one do in the face of those eyes?" finally assented.

After that the afternoon went rushing by on wings of joy. When the visitors departed Missy had many duties to perform, but they were not dull, ordinary duties; they were all tinted over with rainbow colours. She stemmed strawberries in the kitchen where Marguerite, the hired girl, was putting up fruit, and she loved the pinkish-red and grey-green

of the berries against the deep yellow of the bowl. She loved, too, the colour of the geraniums against the green-painted sill just beside her. And the sunlight making leafwork brocade on the grass out the window! There were times when combinations of colour seemed the most beautiful thing in the world.

Then she had to mind the baby for a while, and she took him out on the side lawn and pretended to play croquet with him. The baby wasn't quite three, and it was delicious to see him, with mallet and ball before a wicket, trying to mimic the actions of his elders. Poppylinda, Missy's big black cat, wanted to play too, and succeeded in getting between the baby's legs and upsetting him. But the baby was under a charm; he only picked himself up and laughed. And Missy was sure that black Poppy also laughed.

That night at supper she didn't have much chance to talk to father about the big event, for he had brought an old friend home to supper. Missy was rather left out of the conversation. She felt glad for that; it is hard to talk to old people; it is hard to express to them the thoughts and feelings that possess you. Besides, to-night she didn't want to talk to anyone, nor to listen. She only wanted to sit immersed in that soft, warm, fluttering deliciousness.

Just as the meal was over the hall telephone rang and, at a sign from mother, she excused herself to answer it. From outside the door she heard father's

friend say: "What beautiful eyes!" Could he be speaking of *her?*

The evening, as the afternoon had been, was divine. When Missy was getting ready for bed she leaned out of the window to look at the night, and the fabric of her soul seemed to stretch out and mingle with all that dark, luminous loveliness. It seemed that she herself was a part of the silver moon high up there, a part of the white, shining radiance which spread down and over leaves and grass everywhere. The strong, damp scent of the ramblers on the porch seemed to be her own fragrant breath, and the black shadows pointing out from the pine trees were her own blots of sadness—sadness vague and mysterious, with more of pleasure in it than pain.

She could hardly bear to leave this mysterious, fascinating night; to leave off thinking the big, vague thoughts the night always called forth; but she had to light the gas and set about the business of undressing.

But, first, she paused to gaze at herself in the looking-glass. For the millionth time she wished she were pretty like Kitty Allen. And Kitty would wear her pink dotted mull to the party. Missy sighed.

Then meditatively she unbraided her long, mouse-coloured braids; twisted them into tentative loops over her ears; earnestly studied the effect. No; her hair was too straight and heavy. She tried to imagine undulating waves across her forehead—if only

mother would let her use crimpers! Perhaps she *would!* And then, perhaps, she wouldn't look so plain. She wished she were not so plain; the longing to be pretty made her fairly ache.

Then slowly the words of that man crept across her memory: "What beautiful eyes!" *Could* he have meant her? She stared at the eyes which stared back from the looking-glass till she had the odd sensation that they were something quite strange and alien to her: big, dark, deep, and grave eyes, peering out from some unknown consciousness. And they were beautiful eyes!

Suddenly she was awakened from her dreams by a voice at the door: "Missy, why in the world haven't you gone to bed?"

Missy started and blushed as though discovered in mischief.

"What *have* you been doing with your hair?"

"Oh, just experimenting. Mother, may I have it crimped for the party?"

"I don't know—we'll see. Now hurry and jump into bed."

After mother had kissed her good night and gone, and after the light had been turned out, Missy lay awake for a long time.

Through the lace window curtains shone the moonlight, a gleaming path along which Missy had often flown out to be a fairy. It is quite easy to be a fairy. You lie perfectly still, your arms stretched out like wings. Then you fix your eyes on the moonlight and imagine you feel your wings stir. And the

first thing you know you feel yourself being wafted through the window, up through the silver-tinged air. You touch the clouds with your magic wand, and from them fall shimmering jewels.

Missy was fourteen, going on fifteen, but she could still play being a fairy.

But to-night, though the fairy path stretched invitingly to her very bed, she did not ride out upon it. She shut her eyes, though she felt wide-awake. She shut her eyes so as to see better the pictures that came before them.

With her eyes shut she could see herself quite plainly at the party. She looked like herself, only *much* prettier. Yes, and a little older, perhaps. Her pink dotted mull was easily recognizable, though it had taken on a certain ethereally chic quality—as if a rosy cloud had been manipulated by French fingers. Her hair was a soft, bright, curling triumph. And when she moved she was graceful as a swaying flower stem.

As Missy watched this radiant being which was herself she could see that she was as gracious and sweet-mannered as she was beautiful; perhaps a bit dignified and reserved, but that is always fitting.

No wonder the other girls and the boys gathered round her, captivated. All the boys were eager to dance with her, and when she danced she reminded you of a swaying lily. Most often her partner was Raymond himself. Raymond danced well too. And he was the handsomest boy at his party. He had

blonde hair and deep, soft black eyes like his father, who was the handsomest as well as the richest man in Cherryvale. And he liked her, for last year, their first year in high school, he used to study the Latin lesson with her and wait for her after school and carry her books home for her. He had done that although Kitty Allen was much prettier than she and though Beulah Crosswhite was much, much smarter. The other girls had teased her about him, and the boys must have teased Raymond, for after a while he had stopped walking home with her. She didn't know whether she was gladder or sorrier for that. But she knew that she was glad he did not ignore that radiant, pink-swathed guest who, in her beautiful vision, was having such a glorious time at his party.

Next morning she awoke to find a soft, misty rain greying the world outside her window. Missy did not mind that; she loved rainy days—they made you feel so pleasantly sad. For a time she lay quiet, watching the slant, silvery threads and feeling mysteriously, fascinatingly, at peace. Then Poppy, who always slept at the foot of her bed, awoke with a tremendous yawning and stretching—exactly the kind of "exercises" that young Doc Alison prescribed for father, who hated to get up in the mornings!

Then Poppy, her exercises done, majestically trod the coverlet to salute her mistress with the accustomed matinal salutation which Missy called a kiss. Mother did not approve of Poppy's "kisses," but

Missy argued to herself that the morning one, dependable as an alarm clock, kept her from oversleeping.

She hugged Poppy, jumped out of bed, and began dressing. When she got downstairs breakfast was ready and the house all sweetly diffused with the dreamy shadows that come with a rainy day.

Father had heard the great news and bantered her: "So we've got a society queen in our midst!"

"*I* think," put in Aunt Nettie, "that it's disgraceful the way they put children forward these days."

"I wouldn't let Missy go if Mrs. Allen wasn't going to be there to look after her," said mother.

"Mother, may I have the hem of my pink dress let down?" asked Missy.

At that father laughed, and Aunt Nettie might just as well have said: "I told you so!" as put on that expression.

"It's my first real party," Missy went on, "and I'd like to look as pretty as I *can*."

Something prompted father, as he rose from the table, to pause and lay his hand on Missy's shoulder.

"Can't you get her a new ribbon or something, mother?" he asked.

"Maybe a new sash," answered mother reflectively. "They've got some pretty brocaded pink ribbon at Bonner's."

After which Missy finished her breakfast in a rapture. It is queer how you can eat, and like what you eat very much, and yet scarcely taste it at all.

When the two hours of practicing were over, mother sent her down town to buy the ribbon for

the sash—a pleasant errand. She changed the black tie on her middy blouse to a scarlet one and let the ends fly out of her grey waterproof cape. Why is it that red is such a divine colour on a rainy day?

Upon her return there was still an hour before dinner, and she sat by the dining-room window with Aunt Nettie, to darn stockings.

"Well, Missy," said Aunt Nettie presently, "a penny for your thoughts."

Missy looked up vaguely, at a loss. "I wasn't thinking of anything exactly," she said.

"What were you smiling about?"

"Was I smiling?"

Just then mother entered and Aunt Nettie said: "Missy smiles, and doesn't know it. Party!"

But Missy knew it wasn't the party entirely. Nor was it entirely the sound of the rain swishing, nor the look of the trees quietly weeping, nor of the vivid red patches of geranium beds. Everything could have been quite different, and still she'd have felt happy. Her feeling, mysteriously, was as much from things *inside* her as from things outside.

After dinner was over and the baby minded for an hour, mother made the pink-brocaded sash. It was very lovely. Then she had an hour to herself, and since the rain wouldn't permit her to spend it in the summerhouse, she took a book up to her own room. It was a book of poems from the Public Library.

The first poem she opened to was one of the most marvellous things she had ever read—almost as won-

derful as "The Blessed Damozel." She was glad she had chanced upon it on a rainy day, and when she felt like this. It was called "A Birthday," and it went:

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these,
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it with doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work in it gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys,
Because the birthday of my life
Is come; my love is come to me.

The poem expressed beautifully what she might have answered when Aunt Nettie asked why she smiled. Only, even though she herself could have expressed it so beautifully then, it was not the kind of answer you'd dream of making to Aunt Nettie.

The next morning Missy awoke to find the rain gone and warm, golden sunshine filtering through the lace curtains. She dressed herself quickly, while the sunshine smiled and watched her toilet. After breakfast, at the piano, her fingers found the scales tiresome. Of themselves they wandered off into unexpected rhythms which seemed to sing aloud:

Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys . . .
Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes . . .

She was idly wondering what a "vair" might be when her dreams were crashed into by mother's reproving voice: "Missy, what *are* you doing? If you don't get right down to practicing, there'll be no more parties!"

Abashed, Missy made her fingers behave, but not her heart. It was singing a tune far out of harmony with chromatic exercises, and she was glad her mother could not hear.

The tune kept right on throughout dinner. During the meal she was called to the telephone, and at the other end was Raymond; he wanted her to save him the first dance that evening. What rapture—this was what happened to the beautiful belles you read about!

After dinner mother and Aunt Nettie went to call upon some ladies they hoped wouldn't be at home —what funny things grown-ups do! The baby was taking his nap, and Missy had a delicious long time ahead in which to be utterly alone.

She took the library book of poems and a book of her father's out to the summerhouse. First she opened the book of her father's. It was a translation of a Russian book, very deep and moving and sad and incomprehensible. A perfectly fascinating book! It always filled her with vague, undefinable emotions. She read:

"O youth, youth! Thou carest for nothing: thou possessest, as it were, all the treasures of the universe; even sorrow comforts thee, even melancholy becomes thee; thou art self-confident and audacious; thou sayest: 'I alone live—behold!' But the days speed on and vanish without a trace and without reckoning, and everything vanishes in thee, like wax in the sun, like snow. . . ."

Missy felt sublime sadness resounding through her soul. It was intolerable that days should speed by irrevocably and vanish, like wax in the sun, like snow. She sighed. But even as she sighed the feeling of sadness began to slip away. So she turned to the poem discovered last night, and read it over happily.

The title, "A Birthday," made her feel that Raymond Bonner was somehow connected with it. This was *his* birthday—and that brought her thoughts back definitely to the party. Mother had said that presents were not expected, that they were getting too big to exchange little presents, yet she would have liked to carry him some little token. The ramblers and honeysuckle above her head sniffed at her in fragrant suggestion—why couldn't she just take him some flowers?

Acting on the impulse, Missy jumped up and began breaking off the loveliest blooms. But after she had gathered a big bunch a swift wave of self-consciousness swept over her. What would they say at the house? Would they let her take them? Would

they understand? And a strong distaste for their inevitable questions, for the explanations which she could not explain definitely even to herself, prompted her not to carry the bouquet to the house. Instead she ran, got a pitcher of water, carried it back to the summerhouse and left the flowers temporarily there, hoping to figure out ways and means later.

At the house she discovered that the baby was awake, so she had to hurry back to take care of him. She always loved to do that; she didn't mind that a desire to dress up in her party attire had just struck her, for the baby always entered into the spirit of her performances. While she was fastening up the pink dotted mull, Poppy walked inquisitively in and sat down to oversee this special, important event. Missy succeeded with the greatest difficulty in adjusting the brocaded sash to her satisfaction. She regretted her unwaved hair, but mother was going to crimp it herself in the evening. The straight, everyday coiffure marred the picture in the mirror, yet, aided by her imagination, it was pleasing. She stood with arms extended in a languid, graceful pose, her head thrown back, gazing with half-closed eyes at something far, far beyond her own eyes in the glass.

Then suddenly she began to dance. She danced with her feet, her arms, her hands, her soul. She felt within her the grace of stately beauties, the heartbeat of dew-jewelled fairies, the longings of untrammelled butterflies—dancing, she could have flown up to heaven at that moment!

A gurgle of sound interrupted her; it was the baby.

"Do you like me, baby?" she cried. "Am I beautiful, baby?"

Baby, now, could talk quite presentably in the language of grown-ups. But in addition he knew all kinds of wise, unintelligible words. Missy knew that they were wise, even though she could not understand their meaning, and she was glad the baby chose, this time, to answer in that secret jargon.

She kissed the baby and, in return, the baby smiled his secret smile. Missy was sure that Poppy then smiled too, a secret smile; so she kissed Poppy also. How wonderful, how mysterious, were the smiles of baby and Poppy! What unknown thoughts produced them?

At this point her cogitations were interrupted and her playacting spoiled by the unexpected return of mother and Aunt Nettie. It seemed that certain of the ladies had obligingly been "out."

"What in the world are you doing, Missy?" asked mother.

Missy suddenly felt herself a very foolish-appearing object in her party finery. She tried to make an answer, but the right words were difficult to find.

"Party!" said Aunt Nettie significantly.

Missy, still standing in mute embarrassment, couldn't have explained how it was not the party *entirely*.

Mother did not scold her for dressing up.

"Better get those things off, dear," she said kindly, "and come in and let me curl your hair. I'd

better do it before supper, before the baby gets cross."

The crimped coiffure was an immense success; even in her middy blouse Missy felt transformed. She could have kissed herself in the glass!

"Do you think I look pretty, mother?" she asked.

"You mustn't think of such things, dear." But, as mother stooped to readjust a waving lock, her fingers felt marvellously tender to Missy's forehead.

Evening arrived with a sunset of grandeur and glory. It made everything look as beautiful as it should look on the occasion of a festival. The beautiful and festive aspect of the world without, and of her heart within, made it difficult to eat supper. And after supper it was hard to breathe naturally, to control her nervous fingers as she dressed.

At last, with the help of mother and Aunt Nettie, her toilet was finished: the pink-silk stockings and slippers shimmering beneath the lengthened pink mull; the brocaded pink ribbon now become a huge, pink-winged butterfly; and, mother's last touch, a pink rosebud holding a tendril—a curling tendril—artfully above the left ear! Missy felt a stranger to herself as, like some gracious belle and fairy princess and airy butterfly all compounded into one, she walked—no, *floated* down the stairs.

"Well!" exclaimed father, "behold the Queen of the Ball!"

But Missy did not mind his bantering tone. The

expression of his eyes told her that *he* thought she looked pretty.

Presently Mrs. Allen and Kitty, in the Allens' surrey, stopped by for her. With them was a boy she had never seen before, a tall, dark boy in a blue-grey braided coat and white duck trousers—a military cadet!

He was introduced as Kitty's cousin, Jim Henley. Missy had heard about this Cousin Jim who was going to visit Cherryvale some time during the summer; he had arrived rather unexpectedly that day.

Kitty herself—in pink dotted mull, of course—was looking rather wan. Mrs. Allen explained she had eaten too much of the candy Cousin Jim had brought her.

Cousin Jim, with creaking new shoes, leaped down to help Missy in. She had received her mother's last admonition, her father's last banter, Aunt Nettie's last anxious peck at her sash, and was just lifting her foot to the surrey step when suddenly she said: "Oh!"

"What is it?" asked mother. "Forgotten something?"

Missy *had* forgotten something. But *how*, with mother's inquiring eyes upon her, and father's and Aunt Nettie's and Mrs. Allen's and Kitty's and Cousin Jim's inquiring eyes upon her, could she mention Raymond's bouquet in the summerhouse? *How* could she get them? *What* should she say? And *what* would they think?

"No," she answered hesitantly. "I guess not."

But the bright shining of her pleasure was a little dimmed. She could not forget those flowers waiting, waiting there in the summerhouse. She worried more about them, so pitifully abandoned, than she did about Raymond's having to go without a remembrance.

Missy sat in the back seat with Mrs. Allen, Kitty in front with her cousin. Now and then he threw a remark over his shoulder, and smiled. He had beautiful white teeth which gleamed out of his dark-skinned face, and he seemed very nice. But he wasn't as handsome as Raymond, nor as nice—even if he did wear a uniform.

When they reached the Bonners they saw it all illumined for the party. The Bonners' house was big and square with a porch running round three sides, the most imposing house in Cherryvale. Already strings of lanterns were lighted on the lawn, blue and red and yellow orbs. The lights made the trees and shrubs seem shadowy and remote, mysterious creatures awhisper over their own business.

Not yet had many guests arrived, but almost immediately they appeared in such droves that it seemed they must have come up miraculously through the floor. The folding camp chairs which lined the parlours and porches (the rented chairs always seen at Cherryvale parties and funerals) were one moment starkly exposed and the next moment hidden by light-hued skirts and by stiffly held, Sunday-trousered dark legs. For a while

that stiffness which inevitably introduces a formal gathering of youngsters held them unnaturally bound. But just as inevitably it wore away, and by the time the folding chairs were drawn up round the little table where "hearts" were to be played, voices were babbling, and laughter was to be heard everywhere for no reason at all.

At Missy's table sat Raymond Bonner, looking handsomer than ever with his golden hair and his eyes like black velvet pansies. There was another boy who didn't count; and then there was the most striking creature Missy had ever seen. She was a city girl visiting in town, an older, tall, red-haired girl, with languishing, long-lashed eyes. She wore a red chiffon dress, lower cut than was worn in Cherryvale, which looked like a picture in a fashion magazine. But it was not her chic alone that made her so striking. It was her manner. Missy was not sure that she knew what "sophisticated" meant, but she decided that the visiting girl's air of self-possession, of calm, almost superior assurance, denoted sophistication. How eloquent was that languid way of using her fan!

In this languishing-eyed presence she herself did not feel at her best; nor was she made happier by the way Raymond couldn't keep his eyes off the visitor. She played her hand badly, so that Raymond and his alluring partner "progressed" to the higher table while she remained with the boy who didn't count. But, as luck would have it, to take the empty places, from the head table, vanquished,

came Cousin Jim and his partner. Jim now played opposite her, and laughed over his "dumbness" at the game.

"I feel sorry for *you!*" he told Missy. "I'm a regular dub at this game!"

"I guess I'm a 'dub' too." It was impossible not to smile back at that engaging flash of white teeth in the dark face.

This time, however, neither of them proved "dubs." Together they "progressed" to the next higher table. Cousin Jim assured her it was all due to her skill. She almost thought that, perhaps, she *was* skillful at "hearts," and for the first time she liked the silly game.

Eventually came time for the prizes—and then dancing. Dancing Missy liked tremendously. Raymond claimed her for the first waltz. Missy wondered, a little wistfully, whether now he mightn't be regretting that pre-engagement, whether he wouldn't rather dance it with the languishing-eyed girl he was following about.

But as soon as the violin and piano, back near the library window, began to play, Raymond came straight to Missy and made his charming bow. They danced through the two parlours and then out to the porch and round its full length; the music carried beautifully through the open windows; it was heavenly dancing outdoors like that. Too soon it was over.

"Will you excuse me?" Raymond asked in his

polite way. "Mother wants to see me about something. I hate to run away, but—"

Scarcely had he gone when Mrs. Allen, with Jim in tow, came hurrying up.

"Oh, Missy! I've been looking for you everywhere. Kitty's awfully sick. She was helping with the refreshments and got hold of some pickles. And on top of all that candy—"

"Oh!" commiserated Missy.

"I've got to get her home at once," Mrs. Allen went on. "I hate to take you away just when your good time's beginning, but—"

"Why does she have to go?" Jim broke in. "I can take you and Kitty home, and then come back, and take her home after the party's over." He gave a little laugh. "You see that gives me an excuse to see the party through myself!"

Mrs. Allen eyed Missy a little dubiously.

"Oh, Mrs. Allen, *couldn't* I?"

"I don't know—I said I'd bring you home myself."

"Oh, Mrs. Allen! *Please!*" Missy's eyes pleaded even more than her voice.

"Well, I don't see why not," decided Kitty's mother, anxious to return to her own daughter. "Jim will take good care of you, and Mrs. Bonner will send you all home early."

When Mrs. Allen, accompanied by her nephew, had hurried away, Missy had an impulse to wander alone, for a moment, out into the deliciously alluring night. She loved the night always, but just now it

looked indescribably beautiful. The grounds were deserted, but the lanterns, quivering in the breeze, seemed to be huge live glow-worms suspended up there in the dark. It was enchantment. Stepping lightly, holding her breath, sniffing at unseen scents, hearing laughter and dance music from far away as if in another world, she penetrated farther and farther into the shadows. An orange-coloured moon was pushing its way over the horizon, so close she could surely reach out her hands and touch it!

And then, too near to belong to any other world, and quite distinctly, she heard a voice beyond the rose arbour:

"Oh, yes! *Words* sound well! But the fact remains you didn't ask me for the first dance."

Missy knew that drawling yet strangely assured voice. Almost, with its tones, she could see the languorously uplifted eyes, the provoking little gesture of fan at lips. Before she could move, whether to advance or to flee, Raymond replied:

"I *wanted* to ask you—you know I wanted to ask you!"

"Oh, yes, you did!" replied the visiting girl ironically.

"I *did!*" protested Raymond.

"Well, why didn't you then?"

"I'd already asked somebody else. I *couldn't!*"

And then the visiting girl laughed strangely. Missy knew she knew with whom Raymond had danced that first dance. Why did she laugh? And Raymond—*oh, oh!*

She had seemed to grow rooted to the ground, unable to get away; her heart, her breathing, seemed to petrify too; they hurt her. Why had Raymond danced with her if he didn't want to? And why, why did that girl laugh? She suddenly felt that she must let them know that she heard them, that she *must* ask why! And, in order not to exclaim the question against her will, she covered her mouth with both hands, and crept silently away from the rose arbour.

Without any definite purpose, borne along by an inner whirlwind of suppressed sobs and utter despair, Missy finally found herself nearer the entrance gate. Fortunately there was nobody to see her; everyone—except those two—was back up there in the glare and noise, laughing and dancing. Laughing and dancing—*oh, oh!* What ages ago it seemed when she too had laughed and danced!

Oh, why hadn't she gone home with Mrs. Allen and Kitty before her silly pleasure had turned to anguish? But, of course, that was what life was: pain crowding elbows with pleasure always—she had read that somewhere. She was just inevitably living Life.

Consoled a trifle by this reflecton and by a certain note of sublimity in her experience, Missy leaned against the gatepost upon which a lantern was blinking its last shred of life, and gazed at the slow-rising, splendid moon.

She was still there when Cousin Jim, walking quickly and his shoes creaking loudly, returned.

"Hello!" he said. "What're you doing out here?"

"Oh, just watching the moon."

"You're a funny girl," he laughed.

"Why am I funny?" Her tone was a little wistful.

"Why, moon-gazing instead of dancing, and everything."

"But I like to dance *too*," emphasized Missy, as if to defend herself against a charge.

"I'll take you up on that. Come straight in and dance the next dance with me!"

Missy obeyed. And then she knew that she had met the Dancer of the World. At first she was pleased that her steps fitted his so well, and then she forgot all about steps and just floated along, on invisible gauzy wings, unconscious of her will of direction, of his will of direction. There was nothing in the world but invisible gauzy wings, which were herself and Jim and the music. And *they* were a part of the music and the music was a part of *them*. It was divine.

"Say, you *can* dance!" said Jim admiringly when the music stopped.

"I love to dance."

"I should say you might! You dance better than any girl I ever danced with!"

This, from a military uniform, was praise indeed. Missy blushed and was moved to hide her exaltation under modesty.

"I guess the reason is because I love it so much. I feel as if it's the music dancing—not me. Do you feel it that way?"

"Never thought of it that way," answered Jim. "But I don't know but what you're right. Say, you *are* a funny girl, aren't you?"

But Missy knew that whatever he meant by her being a "funny girl" he didn't dislike her for it, because he rushed on: "You must let me have a lot of dances—every one you can spare."

After that everything was rapture. All the boys liked to dance with Missy because she was such a good dancer, and Jim kept wanting to cut in to get an extra dance with her himself. Somehow even the sting of the visiting girl's laugh and of Raymond's defection seemed to have subsided into triviality. And when Raymond came up to ask for a dance she experienced a new and pleasurable thrill in telling him she was already engaged. That thrill disturbed her a little. Was it possible that she was vindictive, wicked? But when she saw Jim approaching while Raymond was receiving his *congé*, she thrilled again, simultaneously wondering whether she was, after all, but a heartless coquette.

Jim had just been dancing with the visiting girl, so she asked: "Is Miss Slade a good dancer?"

"Oh, fair. Not in it with you, though."

Missy thrilled again, and felt wicked again—alas, how pleasant is wickedness! "She's awfully pretty," vouchsafed Missy.

"Oh, I guess so"—indifferently.

Yet another thrill.

They took refreshments together, Jim going to

get her a second glass of lemonade and waiting upon her with devotion. Then came the time to go home. Missy could not hold back a certain sense of triumph as, after thanking Raymond for a glorious time, she started off, under his inquisitive eye, arm in arm with Jim.

That unwonted arm-in-arm business confused Missy a good deal. She had an idea it was the proper thing when one is being escorted home, and had put her arm in his as a matter of course, but before they had reached the gate she was acutely conscious of the touch of her arm on his. To make matters worse, a curious wave of embarrassment was creeping over her; she couldn't think of anything to say, and they had walked nearly a block down moon-flooded Silver Street, with no sound but Jim's creaking shoes, before she got out: "How do you like Cherryvale, Mr. Henley?"

"Looks good to me," he responded.

Then silence again, save for Jim's shoes. Missy racked her brains. What *do* you say to boys who don't know the same people and affairs you do? Back there at the party things had gone easily, but they were playing cards or dancing or eating; there had been no need for tête-à-tête conversation. How do you talk to people you don't know?

She liked Jim, but the need to make talk was spoiling everything. She moved along beside his creaking shoes as in a nightmare, and, as she felt every atom of her freezing to stupidity, she des-

perately forced her voice: "What a beautiful night it is!"

"Yes, it's great."

Missy sent him a sidelong glance. He didn't look exactly happy either. Did he feel awkward too?

Creak! creak! creak! said the shoes.

"Listen to those shoes—never heard 'em squeak like that before," he muttered apologetically.

Missy, striving for a proper answer and finding none, kept on moving through that feeling of nightmare. What was the matter with her tongue, her brain? Was it because she didn't know Jim well enough to talk to him? Surely not, for she had met strange boys before and not felt like this. Was it because it was night? Did you always feel like this when you were all dressed up and going home from an evening party?

Creak! creak! said the shoes.

Another block lay behind them.

Missy, fighting that sensation of stupidity, in anguished resolution spoke again: "Just look at the moon—how big it is!"

Jim followed her upward glance. "Yes, it's great," he agreed.

Creak! creak! said the shoes.

A heavy, regularly punctuated pause. "Don't you love moonlight nights?" persisted Missy.

"Yes—when my shoes don't squeak." He tried to laugh.

Missy tried to laugh too.

Creak! creak! said the shoes.

Another block lay behind them.

"Moonlight always makes me feel—"

She paused. What was it moonlight always made her feel? Hardly hearing what she was saying, she made herself reiterate banalities about the moon. Her mind flew upward to the moon—Jim's downward to his squeaking shoes. She lived at the other end of town from Raymond Bonner's house, and the long walk was made up of endless intermittent perorations on the moon, on squeaking shoes. But the song of the shoes never ceased. Louder and louder it waxed. It crashed into the innermost fibres of her frame, completely deafened her mental processes. Never would she forget it: creak-creak-creak-creak!

And the moon, usually so kind and gentle, grinned down derisively.

At last, after eons, they reached the corner of her own yard. How unchanged, how natural everything looked here! Over there, across the stretch of white moonlight, sat the summerhouse, symbol of peace and every day, cloaked in its fragrant ramblers.

Ramblers! A sudden remembrance darted through Missy's perturbed brain. Her poor flowers—were they still out there? She must carry them into the house with her! On the impulse, without pausing to reflect that her action might look queer, she exclaimed: "Wait a minute!" and ran fleetly across the moonlit yard. In a second she had the bouquet

out of the pitcher and was back again beside him, breathless.

"I left them out there," she said. "I—I forgot them. And I didn't want to leave them out there all night."

Jim bent down and sniffed at the roses. "They smell awfully sweet, don't they?" he said.

Suddenly, without premeditation, Missy extended them to him. "You may have them," she offered.

"*I?*" He received them awkwardly. "That's awfully sweet of you. Say, you *are* sweet, aren't you?"

"You may have them if you want them," she repeated.

Jim, still holding the bunch awkwardly, had an inspiration.

"I *do* want them. And now, if they're really mine, I want to do with them what I'd like most to do with them. May I?"

"Why, of course."

"I'd like to give them to the girl who ought to have flowers more than any girl I know. I'd like to give them to *you!*"

He smiled at her daringly.

"Oh!" breathed Missy. How poetical he was!

"But," he stipulated, "on one condition. I demand one rose for myself. And *you* must put it in my buttonhole for me."

With trembling fingers Missy fixed the rose in place.

They walked on up to the gate.

Jim said: "In our school town the girls are all crazy for brass buttons. They make hatpins and things. If you'd like a button, I'd like to give you one—off my sleeve."

"Wouldn't it spoil your sleeve?" she asked tremulously.

"Oh, I can get more"—somewhat airily. "Of course we have to do extra guard mount and things for punishment. But that's part of the game, and no fellow minds if he's giving buttons to somebody he *likes*."

Missy wasn't exactly sure she knew what "subtle" meant, but she felt that Jim was being subtle. Oh, the romance of it! To give her a brass button he was willing to suffer punishment. He was like a knight of old!

As Jim was severing the button with his pen-knife, Missy, chancing to glance upward, noted that the curtain of an upstairs window was being held back by an invisible hand. That was her mother's window.

"I must go in now," she said hurriedly. "Mother's waiting up for me."

"Well I guess I'll see you soon. You're up at Kitty's a lot, aren't you?"

"Yes," she murmured, one eye on the upstairs window. So many things she had to say *now*. A little while ago she hadn't been able to talk. Now, for no apparent reason, there was much to say, yet no time to say it. How queer Life was!

"To-morrow, I expect," she hurried on. "Good night, Mr. Henley."

"Good night—Missy." With his daring, gleaming smile.

Inside the hall door, mother, wrapper-clad, met her disapprovingly. "Missy, where in the world did you get all those flowers?"

"Ji—Kitty's cousin gave them to me."

"For the land's sake!" It required a moment for mother to find further words. Then she continued accusingly: "I thought you were to come home with Mrs. Allen and Kitty."

"Kitty got sick, and her mother had to take her home."

"Why didn't you come with them?"

"Oh, mother! I was having such a good time!" For the minute Missy had forgotten there had been a shred of anything but "good time" in the whole glorious evening. "And Mrs. Allen said I might stay and come home with Jim and—"

"That will do," cut in mother severely. "You've taken advantage of me, Missy. And don't let me hear evening party from you again this summer!"

The import of this dreadful dictum did not penetrate fully to Missy's consciousness. She was too confused in her emotions, just then, to think clearly of anything.

"Go up to bed," said mother.

"May I put my flowers in water first?"

"Yes, but be quick about it."

Missy would have liked to carry the flowers up to her own room, to sleep there beside her while she slept, but mother wouldn't understand and there

would be questions which she didn't know how to answer.

Mother was offended with her. Dimly she felt unhappy about that, but she was too happy to be definitely unhappy. Anyway, mother followed to unfasten her dress, to help take down her hair, to plait the mouse-coloured braids. She wanted to be alone, yet she liked the touch of mother's hands, unusually gentle and tender. Why was mother gentle and tender with her when she was offended?

At last mother kissed her good night, and she was alone in her little bed. It was hard to get to sleep. What an eventful party it had been! Since supper time she seemed to have lived years and years. She had been a success even though Raymond Bonner had said—*that*. Anyway, Jim was a better dancer than Raymond, and handsomer and nicer—besides the uniform. He was more poetical too—much more. What was it he had said about liking her? . . . better dancer than any other. . . . Funny she should feel so happy after Raymond . . . Maybe she was just a vain, inconstant, coquettish . . .

She strove to focus on the possibility of her frailty. She turned her face to the window. Through the lace curtains shone the moonlight, the gleaming path along which she had so often flown out to be a fairy. But to-night she didn't wish to be a fairy; just to be herself . . .

The moonlight flowed in and engulfed her, a great, eternal, golden-white mystery. And its mystery be-

came her mystery. She was the mystery of the moon, of the universe, of Life. And the tune in her heart, which could take on so many bewildering variations, became the Chant of Mystery. How interesting, how tremendously, ineffably interesting was Life! She slept.

IV

Missy Tackles Romance

MELISSA was out in the summerhouse, reading; now and then lifting her eyes from the big book on her lap to watch the baby at play. With a pail of sand, a broken lead-pencil and several bits of twig, the baby had concocted an engrossing game. Melissa smiled indulgently at his absurd absorption; while the baby, looking up, smiled back as one who would say: "What a stupid game reading is to waste your time with!"

For the standpoint of three-years-old is quite different from that of fourteen-going-on-fifteen. Missy now felt almost grown-up; it had been eons since *she* was a baby, and three; even thirteen lay back across a chasm so wide her thoughts rarely tried to bridge it. Besides, her thoughts were kept too busy with the present. Every day the world was presenting itself as a more bewitching place. Cherryvale had always been a thrilling place to live in; but this was the summer which, surely, would ever stand out in italics in her mind. For, this summer, she had come really to know Romance.

Her more intimate acquaintance with this enchanting phenomenon had begun in May, the last

month of school, when she learned that Miss Smith, her Algebra teacher, received a letter every day from an army officer. An army officer!—and a letter every day! And *she* knew Miss Smith very well, indeed! Ecstasy! Miss Smith, who looked too pretty to know so much about Algebra, made an adorable heroine of Romance.

But she was not more adorable-looking than Aunt Isabel. Aunt Isabel was Uncle Charlie's wife, and lived in Pleasanton; Missy was going to Pleasanton in just three days, now, and every time she thought of the visit, she felt delicious little tremors of anticipation. What an experience that would be!

For father and mother and grandpa and grandma and all the other family grown-ups admitted that Uncle Charlie's marriage to Aunt Isabel was romantic. Uncle Charlie had been forty-three—very, very old, even older than father—and a "confirmed bachelor" when, a year ago last summer, he had married Aunt Isabel. Aunt Isabel was much younger, only twenty; that was what made the marriage romantic.

Like Miss Smith, Aunt Isabel had big violet eyes and curly golden hair. Most heroines seemed to be like that. The reflection saddened Missy. Her own eyes were grey instead of violet, her hair straight and mouse-coloured instead of wavy and golden.

Even La Beale Isoud was a blonde, and La Beale Isoud, as she had recently discovered, was one of the Romantic Queens of all time. She knew this fact on the authority of grandpa, who was enormously wise. Grandpa said that the beauteous lady was

a heroine in all languages, and her name was spelled Iseult, and Yseult, and Isolde, and other queer ways; but in "The Romance of King Arthur" it was spelled La Beale Isoud. "The Romance of King Arthur" was a fascinating book, and Missy was amazed that, up to this very summer, she had passed by the rather ponderous volume, which was kept on the top shelf of the "secretary," as uninteresting-looking. Uninteresting!

It was "The Romance of King Arthur" that, this July afternoon, lay open on Missy's lap while she minded the baby in the summerhouse. Already she knew by heart its "deep" and complicated story, and, now, she was re-reading the part which told of Sir Tristram de Liones and his ill-fated love for La Beale Isoud. It was all very sad, yet very beautiful.

Sir Tristram was a "worshipful knight" and a "harper passing all other." He got wounded, and his uncle, King Mark, "let purvey a fair vessel, well victualled," and sent him to Ireland to be healed. There the Irish King's daughter, La Beale Isoud, "the fairest maid and lady in the world," nursed him back to health, while Sir Tristram "learned her to harp."

That last was an odd expression. In Cherryvale it would be considered bad grammar; but, evidently, grammar rules were different in olden times. The unusual phraseology of the whole narrative fascinated Missy; even when you could hardly understand it, it was—inspiring. Yes, that was the word. In-

spiring! That was because it was the true language of Romance. The language of Love . . . Missy's thoughts drifted off to ponder the kind of language the army officer used to Miss Smith; Uncle Charlie to Aunt Isabel . . .

She came back to the tale of La Beale Isoud.

Alas! true love must ever suffer at the hands of might. For the harper's uncle, old King Mark himself, decided to marry La Beale Isoud; and he ordered poor Sir Tristram personally to escort her from Ireland. And Isoud's mother entrusted to two servants a magical drink which they should give Isoud and King Mark on their wedding-day, so that the married pair "either should love the other the days of their life."

But, Tristram and La Beale Isoud found that love-drink! Breathing quickly, Missy read the fateful part:

"*It happened so that they were thirsty, and it seemed by the colour and the taste that it was a noble wine. When Sir Tristram took the flasket in his hand, and said, 'Madam Isoud, here is the best drink that ever ye drunk, that Dame Braguaine, your maiden, and Gouvernail, my servant, have kept for themselves.' Then they laughed* (laughed—think of it!) *and made good cheer, and either drank to other freely. And they thought never drink that ever they drank was so sweet nor so good. But by that drink was in their bodies, they loved either other so well that never their love departed for weal neither for woe.*" (Think of *that*, too!)

Missy gazed at the accompanying illustration: La

Beale Isoud slenderly tall in her straight girdled gown of grey-green velvet, head thrown back so that her filleted golden hair brushed her shoulders, violet eyes half-closed, and an "antique"-looking metal goblet clasped in her two slim hands; and Sir Tristram so imperiously dark and handsome in his crimson, fur-trimmed doublet, his two hands stretched out and gripping her two shoulders, his black eyes burning as if to look through her closed lids. What a tremendous situation! Love that never would depart for weal neither for woe!

Missy sighed. For she had read and re-read what was the fullness of their woe. And she couldn't help hating King Mark, even if he was Isoud's lawful lord, because he proved himself such a recreant and false traitor to true love. Of course, he *was* Isoud's husband; and Missy lived in Cherryvale, where conventions were not complicated and were strictly adhered to; else scandal was the result. But she told herself that this situation was different because it was an unusual kind of love. They couldn't help themselves. It wasn't their fault. It was the love-drink that did it. Besides, it happened in the Middle Ages . . .

Suddenly her reverie was blasted by a compelling disaster. The baby, left to his own devices, had stuck a twig into his eye, and was uttering loud cries for attention. Missy remorsefully hurried over and kissed his hurt. As if healed thereby, the baby abruptly ceased crying; even sent her a little wavering smile. Missy gazed at him and pondered: why

do babies cry over their tiny troubles, and so often laugh over their bigger ones? She felt an immense yearning over babies—over all things inexplicable.

That evening after supper, grandpa and grandma came over for a little while. They all sat out on the porch and chatted. It was very beautiful out on the porch,—greying twilight, and young little stars just coming into being, all aquiver as if frightened.

The talk turned to Missy's imminent visit.

"Aren't you afraid you'll get homesick?" asked grandma.

It was Missy's first visit away from Cherryvale without her mother. A year ago she would have dreaded the separation, but now she was almost grown-up. Besides, this very summer, in Cherryvale, she had seen how for some reason, a visiting girl seems to excite more attention than does a mere home girl. Missy realized that, of course, she wasn't so "fashionable" as was the sophisticated Miss Slade from Macon City who had so agitated Cherryvale, yet she was pleased to try the experience for herself. Moreover, the visit was to be at Uncle Charlie's!

"Oh, no," answered Missy. "Not with Uncle Charlie and Aunt Isabel. She's so pretty and wears such pretty clothes—remember that grey silk dress with grey-topped shoes exactly to match?"

"I think she has shoes to match everything, even her wrappers," said grandma rather drily. "Isabel's very extravagant."

"Extravagance becomes a virtue when Isabel wears the clothes," commented grandpa. Grandpa often

said "deep" things like that, which were hard to understand exactly.

"She shouldn't squander Charlie's money," insisted grandma.

"Charlie doesn't seem to mind it," put in mother in her gentle way. "He's as pleased as Punch buying her pretty things."

"Yes—poor Charlie!" agreed grandma. "And there's another thing: Isabel's always been used to so much attention, I hope she won't give poor Charlie anxiety."

Why did grandma keep calling him "poor" Charlie? Missy had always understood that Uncle Charlie wasn't poor at all; he owned the biggest "general store" in Pleasanton and was, in fact, the "best-fixed" of the whole Merriam family.

But, save for fragments, she soon lost the drift of the family discussion. She was absorbed in her own trend of thoughts. At Uncle Charlie's she was sure of encountering Romance. Living-and-breathing Romance. And only two days more! How could she wait?

But the two days flew by in a flurry of mending, and running ribbons, and polishing all her shoes and wearing old dresses to keep her good ones clean, and, finally, packing. It was all so exciting that only at the last minute just before the trunk was shut, did she remember to tuck in "The Romance of King Arthur."

At the depot in Pleasanton, Aunt Isabel alone met her; Uncle Charlie was "indisposed." Missy

was sorry to hear that. For she had liked Uncle Charlie even before he had become Romantic. He was big and silent like father and grandpa and you had a feeling that, like them, he understood you more than did most grown-ups.

She liked Aunt Isabel, too; she couldn't have helped that, because Aunt Isabel was so radiantly beautiful. Missy loved all beautiful things. She loved the heavenly colour of sunlight through the stained-glass windows at church; the unquenchable blaze of her nasturtium bed under a blanket of grey mist; the corner street-lamp reflecting on the wet sidewalk; the smell of clean, sweet linen sheets; the sound of the brass band practicing at night, blaring but unspeakably sad through the distance; the divine mystery of faint-tinted rainbows; trees in moonlight turned into great drifts of fairy-white blossoms.

And she loved shining ripples of golden hair; and great blue eyes that laughed in a sidewise glance and then turned softly pensive in a second; and a sweet high voice now vivacious and now falling into hushed cadences; and delicate white hands always restlessly fluttering; and, a drifting, elusive fragrance, as of wind-swept petals. . . .

All of which meant that she loved Aunt Isabel very much; especially in the frilly, pastel-flowered organdy she was wearing to-day—an "extravagant" dress, doubtless, but lovely enough to justify that.

Naturally such a person as Aunt Isabel would make her home a beautiful place. It was a "bunga-

low." Missy had often regretted that her own home had been built before the vogue of the bungalow. And now, when she beheld Aunt Isabel's enchanting house, the solid, substantial furnishings left behind in Cherryvale lost all their savour for her, even the old-fashioned "quaintness" of grandma's house.

For Aunt Isabel's house was what Pleasanton termed "artistic." It had white-painted woodwork, and built-in bookshelves instead of ordinary bookcases, and lots of window-seats, and chintz draperies which trailed flowers or birds or peacocks, which were like a combination of both, and big wicker chairs with deep cushions—all very bright and cosy and beautiful. In the living-room were some Chinese embroideries which Missy liked, especially when the sun came in and shone upon their soft, rich colours; she had never before seen Chinese embroideries and, thus, encountered a brand-new love. Then Aunt Isabel was the kind of woman who keeps big bowls of fresh flowers sitting around in all the rooms, even if there's no party—a delightful habit. Missy was going to adore watching Aunt Isabel's pretty, restless hands flutter about as, each morning, she arranged the fresh flowers in their bowls.

Even in Missy's room there was a little bowl of jade-green pottery, a colour which harmonized admirably with sweet peas, late roses, nasturtiums, or what-not. And all the furniture in that room was painted white, while the chintz bloomed with delicate little nosegays.

The one inharmonious element was that of Uncle

Charlie's indisposition—not only the fact that he was suffering, but also the nature of his ailment. For Uncle Charlie, it developed, had been helping move a barrel of mixed-pickles in the grocery department of his store, and the barrel had fallen full-weight upon his foot and broken his big toe. Missy realized that, of course, a tournament with a sword-thrust in the heart, or some catastrophe like that, would have meant a more dangerous injury; but—a barrel of pickles! And his big toe! Any toe was unromantic. But the *big* toe! That was somehow the worst of all.

Uncle Charlie, however, spoke quite openly of the cause of his trouble. Also of its *locale*. Indeed, he could hardly have concealed the latter, as his whole foot was bandaged up, and he had to hobble about, very awkwardly, with the aid of a cane.

Uncle Charlie's indisposition kept him from accompanying Missy and Aunt Isabel to an ice-cream festival which was held on the Congregational church lawn that first night. Aunt Isabel was a Congregationalist; and, as mother was a Presbyterian and grandma a Methodist, Missy was beginning to feel a certain kinship with all religions.

This festival proved to be a sort of social gathering, because the Congregational church in Pleasanton was attended by the town's "best" people. The women were as stylishly dressed as though they were at a bridge party—or a tournament. The church lawn looked very picturesque with red, blue and yellow lanterns—truly a fair lawn and "well victualled"

with its ice-cream tables in the open. Large numbers of people strolled about, and ate, and chatted and laughed. The floating voices of people you couldn't see, the flickering light of the lanterns, the shadows just beyond their swaying range, all made it seem gay and alluring, so that you almost forgot that it was only a church festival.

A big moon rose up from behind the church-tower, a beautiful and medieval-looking combination. Missy thought of those olden-time feasts "unto kings and dukes," when there was revel and play, and "all manner of noblesse." And, though none but her suspected it, the little white-covered tables became long, rough-hewn boards, and the Congregational ladies' loaned china became antique-looking pewter, and the tumblers of water were golden flaskets of noble wine. Missy, who was helping Aunt Isabel serve at one of the tables, attended her worshipful patrons with all manner of noblesse. She was glad she was wearing her best pink mull with the brocaded sash.

Aunt Isabel's table was well patronized. It seemed to Missy that most of the men present tried to get "served" here. Perhaps it was because they admired Aunt Isabel. Missy couldn't have blamed them for that, because none of the other Congregational ladies was half as pretty. To-night Aunt Isabel had on a billowy pale-blue organdy, and she looked more like an angel than ever. An ethereally radiant, laughing, vivacious angel. And whenever she moved near you, you caught a ghostly whiff of

that delicious perfume. (Missy now knows Aunt Isabel got it from little sachet bags, tucked away with her clothes, and from an "atomizer" which showered a delicate, fairy-like spray of fragrance upon her hair.) There was one young man, who was handsome in a dark, imperious way, who hung about and ate so much ice-cream that Missy feared lest he should have an "upset" to-morrow.

Also, there was another persevering patron for whom she surmised, with modest palpitation, Aunt Isabel might not be the chief attraction. The joy of being a visiting girl was begun! This individual was a talkative, self-confident youth named Raleigh Peters. She loved the name Raleigh—though for the Peters part she didn't care so much. And albeit, with the dignity which became her advancing years, she addressed him as "Mr. Peters," in her mind she preferred to think of him as "Raleigh." Raleigh, she learned (from himself), was the only son of a widowed mother and, though but little older than Missy, had already started making his own way by clerking in Uncle Charlie's store. He clerked in the grocery department, the prosperity of which, she gathered, was largely due to his own connection with it. Some day, he admitted, he was going to own the biggest grocery store in the State. He was thrillingly independent and ambitious and assured. All that seemed admirable, but—if only he hadn't decided on groceries! "Peters' Grocery Store!" Missy thought of jousting, of hawking, of harping, customs which noble gentlemen used to follow, and sighed.

But Raleigh, unaware that his suit had been lost before it started, accompanied them all home. "All" because the dark and imperiously handsome young man went along, too. His name was Mr. Saunders, and Missy had now learned he was a "travelling man" who came to Pleasanton to sell Uncle Charlie merchandise; he was also quite a friend of the family's, she gathered, and visited them at the house.

When they reached home, Mr. Saunders suggested stopping in a minute to see how Uncle Charlie was. However, Uncle Charlie, it turned out, was already in bed.

"But you needn't go yet, anyway," said Aunt Isabel. "It's heavenly out here on the porch."

"Doesn't the hour wax late?" demurred Mr. Saunders. "Wax late!"—What quaint, delightful language he used!

"Oh, it's still early. Stay a while, and help shake off the atmosphere of the festival—those festivals bore me to death!"

Odd how women can act one way while they're feeling another way! Missy had supposed, at the festival, that Aunt Isabel was having a particularly enjoyable time.

"Stay and let's have some music," Aunt Isabel went on. "You left your ukelele here last week."

So the handsome Mr. Saunders played the ukelele! —How wonderfully that suited his type. And it was just the kind of moonlight night for music. Missy rejoiced when Mr. Saunders decided to stay, and Aunt Isabel went in the house for the ukelele.

It was heavenly when Mr. Saunders began to play and sing. The others had seated themselves in porch chairs, but he chose a place on the top step, his head thrown back against a pillar, and the moon shining full on his dark, imperious face. His bold eyes now gazed dreamily into distance as, in a golden tenor that seemed to melt into the moonlight itself, he sang:

> *"They plucked the stars out of the blue, dear,*
> *Gave them to you, dear,*
> *For eyes . . ."*

The ukelele under his fingers thrummed out a soft, vibrant, melancholy accompaniment. It was divine! Here surely was a "harper passing all other!" Mr. Saunders looked something like a knight, too—all but his costume. He was so tall and dark and handsome; and his dark eyes were bold, though now so soft from his own music.

The music stopped. Aunt Isabel jumped up from her porch chair, left the shadows, and seated herself beside him on the moonlit top.

"That looks easy," she said. "Show me how to do it."

She took the ukelele from him. He showed her how to place her fingers—their fingers got tangled up—they laughed.

Missy started to laugh, too, but stopped right in the middle of it. A sudden thought had struck her, remembrance of another beauteous lady who had been "learned" to harp. She gazed down on Aunt

Isabel—how beautiful there in the white moonlight! So fair and slight, the scarf-thing around her shoulders like a shroud of mist, hair like unto gold, eyes like the stars of heaven. Her eyes were now lifted laughingly to Mr. Saunders'. She was so close he must catch that faintly sweetness of her hair. He returned the look and started to sing again; while La Beale—no, Aunt Isabel—

Even the names were alike!

Missy drew in a quick, sharp breath. Mr. Saunders, now smiling straight at Aunt Isabel as she tried to pick the chords, went on:

> *"They plucked the stars out of the blue, dear,*
> *Gave them to you, dear,*
> *For eyes . . ."*

How expressively he sang those words! Missy became troubled. Of course Romance was beautiful but those things belonged in ancient times. You wouldn't want things like that right in your own family, especially when Uncle Charlie already had a broken big toe . . .

She forgot that the music was beautiful, the night bewitching; she even forgot to listen to what Raleigh was saying, till he leaned forward and demanded irately:

"Say! you haven't gone to sleep, have you?"

Missy gave a start, blinked, and looked self-conscious.

"Oh, excuse me," she murmured. "I guess I was sort of dreaming."

Mr. Saunders, overhearing, glanced up at her.

"The spell of moon and music, fair maid?" he asked. And, though he smiled, she didn't feel that he was making fun of her.

Again that quaint language! A knight of old might have talked that way! But Missy, just now, was doubtful as to whether a knight in the flesh was entirely desirable.

It was with rather confused emotions that, after the visitors had departed and she had told Aunt Isabel good night, Missy went up to the little white-painted, cretonne-draped room. Life was interesting, but sometimes it got very queer.

After she had undressed and snapped off the light, she leaned out of the window and looked at the night for a long time. Missy loved the night; the hordes of friendly little stars which nodded and whispered to one another; the round silver moon, up there at some enigmatic distance yet able to transfigure the whole world with fairy-whiteness—turning the dew on the grass into pearls, the leaves on the trees into trembling silver butterflies, and the dusty street into a breadth of shimmering silk. At night, too, the very flowers seemed to give out a sweeter odour; perhaps that was because you couldn't see them.

Missy leaned farther out the window to sniff in that damp, sweet scent of unseen flowers, to feel the white moonlight on her hand. She had often wished that, by some magic, the world might be enabled to spin out its whole time in such a gossamer, irradiant

sheen as this — a sort of moon-haunted night-without-end, keeping you tingling with beautiful, blurred, indescribable feelings.

But to-night, for the first time, Missy felt skeptical as to that earlier desire. She still found the night beautiful—oh, inexpressibly beautiful!—but moonlight nights were what made lovers want to look into each other's eyes, and sing each other love-songs "with expression." To be sure, she had formerly considered this very tendency an elysian feature of such nights; but that was when she thought that love always was right for its own sake, that true lovers never should be thwarted. She still held by that belief; and yet—she visioned Uncle Charlie, dear Uncle Charlie, so fond of buying Aunt Isabel extravagant organdies and slippers to match; so like grandpa and father—and King Mark!

Missy had always hated King Mark, the lawful husband, the enemy of true love. But Romance gets terribly complicated when it threatens to leave the Middle Ages, pop right in on you when you are visiting in Pleasanton; and when the lawful husband is your own Uncle Charlie—poor Uncle Charlie!—lying in there suffering with his broken—well there was no denying it *was* his big toe.

Missy didn't know that her eyes had filled—tears sometimes came so unexpectedly nowadays—till a big drop splashed down on her hand.

She felt very, very sad. Often she didn't mind being sad. Sometimes she even enjoyed it in a peculiar way on moonlit nights; found a certain pleas-

ant poignancy of exaltation in the feeling. But there are different kinds of sadness. To-night she didn't like it. She forsook the moonlit vista and crept into bed.

The next morning she overslept. Perhaps it was because she wasn't in her own little east room at home, where the sun and Poppy, her cat, vied to waken her; or perhaps because it had turned intensely hot and sultry during the night—the air seemed to glue down her eyelids so as to make waking up all the harder.

It was Sunday, and, when she finally got dressed and downstairs, the house was still unusually quiet. But she found Uncle Charlie in his "den" with the papers. He said Aunt Isabel was staying in bed with a headache; and he himself hobbled into the dining room with Missy, and sat with her while the maid (Aunt Isabel called her hired girl a "maid") gave her breakfast.

Uncle Charlie seemed cheerful despite his—his trouble. And everything seemed so peaceful and beautiful that Missy could hardly realize that ever Tragedy might come to this house. Somewhere in the distance church bells were tranquilly sounding. Out in the kitchen could be heard the ordinary clatter of dishes. And in the dining room it was very, very sweet. The sun filtered through the gently swaying curtains, touching vividly the sweet peas on the breakfast-table. The sweet peas were arranged to stand upright in a round, shallow bowl, just as if they were growing up out of a little pool—

a marvellously artistic effect. The china was very artistic, too, Japanese, with curious-looking dragons in soft old-blue. And, after the orange, she had a finger-bowl with a little sprig of rose-geranium she could crunch between her fingers till it sent out a heavenly odour. It was just like Aunt Isabel to have rose-geranium in her finger-bowls!

Her mind was filled with scarcely defined surmises concerning Aunt Isabel, her unexpected headache, and the too handsome harper. But Uncle Charlie, unsuspecting, talked on in that cheerful strain. He was teasing Missy because she liked the ham and eggs and muffins, and took a second helping of everything.

"Good thing I can get groceries at wholesale!" he bantered. "Else I'd never dare ask you to visit me!"

Missy returned his smile, grateful that the matter of her appetite might serve to keep him jolly a little while longer. Perhaps he didn't even suspect, yet. *Did* he suspect? She couldn't forbear a tentative question:

"What seems to be the matter with Aunt Isabel, Uncle Charlie?"

"Why, didn't I tell you she has a headache?'

"Oh! a headache." She was silent a second; then, as if there was something strange about this malady, she went on: "Did she *say* she had a headache?"

"Of course, my dear. It's a pretty bad one. I guess it must be the weather."

It *was* hot. Uncle Charlie had taken off his coat and was in his shirt sleeves—she was pleased to note it was a silken shirt; little beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and on his head where it was just beginning to get bald. Somehow, the fact that he looked so hot had the effect of making her feel even more tender toward him. So, though she thirsted for information, not for the world would she have aroused his suspicions by questions. And she made her voice very casual, when she finally enquired:

"By the way, that Mr. Saunders who brought us home is awfully handsome. Sort of gallant looking, don't you think?"

Uncle Charlie laughed; then shook his finger at her in mock admonition.

"Oh, Missy! *You've* fallen, too?"

Missy gulped; Uncle Charlie had made an unwitting revelation! But she tried not to give herself away; still casual, she asked:

"Oh! do other people fall?"

"All the ladies fall for Saunders," said Uncle Charlie.

Missy hesitated, then hazarded:

"Aunt Isabel, too?"

"Oh, yes." Uncle Charlie looked pathetically unconcerned. "Aunt Isabel likes to have him around. He often comes in handy at dances."

It would be just like Mr. Saunders to be a good dancer!

"He harps well, too," she said meditatively.

"What's that?" enquired Uncle Charlie.

"Oh, I mean that thing he plays."

"The ukelele. Yes, Saunders is a wizard with it. But in spite of that he's a good fellow." (What did "in spite of that" mean—didn't Uncle Charlie approve of harpers?)

He continued: "He sometimes goes on fishing-trips with me."

Fishing-trips! From father Missy had learned that this was the highest proof of *camaraderie*. So Uncle Charlie *didn't* suspect. He was harbouring the serpent in his very bosom. Missy crumpled the fragrant rose-geranium reflectively between her fingers.

Then Uncle Charlie suggested that she play something for him on the piano. And Missy, feeling every minute tenderer toward him because she must keep to herself the dreadful truths which would hurt him if he knew, hurried to his side, took away his cane, and put her own arm in its place for him to lean on. And Uncle Charlie seemed to divine there was something special in her deed, for he reached down and patted the arm which supported him, and said:

"You're a dear child, Missy."

In the living-room the sun was shining through the charming, cretonne-hung bay window and upon the soft, rich colours of the Chinese embroideries. The embroideries were on the wall beyond the piano, so that she could see them while she played. Uncle Charlie wasn't in her range of vision unless she turned her head; but she could smell his cigar, and

could sense him sitting there very quiet in a big wicker chair, smoking, his eyes half closed, his bandaged foot stretched out on a little stool.

And her poignant feeling of sympathy for him, sitting there thus, and her rapturous delight in the sun-touched colours of the embroideries, and the hushed peace of the hot Sabbath morning, all seemed to intermingle and pierce to her very soul. She was glad to play the piano. When deeply moved she loved to play, to pour out her feelings in dreamy melodies and deep vibrant harmonies with queer minor cadences thrown in—the kind of music you can play "with expression," while you vision mysterious, poetic pictures.

After a moment's reflection, she decided on "The Angel's Serenade"; she knew it by heart, and adored playing it. There was something brightly-sweet and brightly-sad in those strains of loveliness; she could almost hear the soft flutter of angelic wings, almost see the silvery sheen of them astir. And, oddly, all that sheen and stir, all that sadly-sweet sound, seemed to come from within herself—just as if her own soul were singing, instead of the piano keyboard.

And with Missy, to play "The Angel's Serenade" was to crave playing more such divine pieces; she drifted on into "Traumerei"; "Simple Confession"; "One Sweetly Solemn Thought," with variations. She played them all with extra "expression," putting all her loving sympathy for Uncle Charlie into her finger-tips. And he must have been soothed by it, for he dozed off, and came to with a start when

she finally paused, to tell her how beautifully she played.

Then began a delicious time of talking together. Uncle Charlie was like grandpa—the kind of man you enjoyed talking with, about deep, unusual things. They talked about music, and the meaning of the pieces she'd played. Then about reading. He asked her what she was reading nowadays.

"This is your book, isn't it?" he enquired, picking up "The Romances of King Arthur" from the table beside him. Heavens! how tactless of her to have brought it down this morning! But there was nothing for her to do, save to act in a natural, casual manner.

"Yes," she said.

Uncle Charlie opened the book. Heavens! it fell open at the illustration of the two lovers drinking the fateful potion!

"Which is your favourite legend?" he asked.

Missy was too nervous to utter anything but the simple truth.

"The story of Sir Tristram and La Beale Isoud," she answered.

"Ah," said Uncle Charlie. He gazed at the picture she knew so well. What was he thinking?

"Why is it your favourite?" he went on.

"I don't know—because it's so romantic, I guess. And so sad and beautiful."

"Ah, yes," said Uncle Charlie. "You have a feeling for the classic, I see. You call her 'Isoud'?"

That pleased Missy; and, despite her agitation over this malaprop theme, she couldn't resist the impulse to air her lately acquired learning.

"Yes, but she has different names in all the different languages, you know. And she was the most beautiful lady or maiden that ever lived."

"Is that so?" said Uncle Charlie. "More beautiful than your Aunt Isabel?"

Missy hesitated, confused; the conversation was getting on dangerous ground. "Why, I guess they're the same type, don't you? I've often thought Aunt Isabel looks like La Beale Isoud."

Uncle Charlie smiled again at her—an altogether cheerful kind of smile; no, he didn't suspect any tragic undercurrent beneath this pleasant-sounding conversation. All he said was:

"Aunt Isabel should feel flattered—but I hope she finds a happier lot."

Ah!

"Yes, I hope so," breathed Missy, rather weakly.

Then Uncle Charlie at last closed the book.

"Poor Tristram and Isolde," he said, as if speaking an epitaph.

But Missy caught her breath. *Uncle Charlie felt sorry for the ill-fated lovers.* Oh, if he only knew!

At dinner time (on Sundays they had midday dinner here), Aunt Isabel came down to the table. She said her head was better, but she looked pale; and her blue eyes were just like the Blessed Damozel's, "deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even." Yet, pale and quiet like this, she seemed even more

beautiful than ever, especially in that adorable lavender negligee—with slippers to match. Missy regarded her with secret fascination.

After dinner, complaining of the heat, Aunt Isabel retired to her room again. She suggested that Missy take a nap, also. Missy didn't think she was sleepy, but, desiring to be alone with her bewildered thoughts, she went upstairs and lay down. The better to think things over, she closed her eyes; and when she opened them to her amazement there was Aunt Isabel standing beside the bed—a radiant vision in pink organdy this time—and saying:

"Wake up, sleepy-head! It's nearly six o'clock!"

Aunt Isabel, her vivacious self once more, with gentle fingers (Oh, hard not to love Aunt Isabel!) helped Missy get dressed for supper.

It was still so hot that, at supper, everyone drank a lot of ice-tea and ate a lot of ice-cream. Missy felt in a steam all over when they rose from the table and went out to sit on the porch. It was very serene, for all the sultriness, out on the porch; and Aunt Isabel was so sweet toward Uncle Charlie that Missy felt her gathering suspicions had something of the unreal quality of a nightmare. Aunt Isabel was reading aloud to Uncle Charlie out of the Sunday paper. Beautiful! The sunset was carrying away its gold like some bold knight with his captured, streaming-tressed lady. The fitful breeze whispered in the rhythm of olden ballads. Unseen church bells sent long-drawn cadences across the evening hush. And the little stars quivered into be-

ing, to peer at the young poignancy of feeling which cannot know what it contributes to the world . . .

Everything was idyllic—that is, almost idyllic—till, suddenly Uncle Charlie spoke:

"Isn't that Saunders coming up the street?"

Why, oh why, did Mr. Saunders have to come and spoil everything?

But poor Uncle Charlie seemed glad to see him—just as glad as Aunt Isabel. Mr. Saunders sat up there amongst them, laughing and joking, now and then directing one of his quaint, romantic-sounding phrases at Missy. And she pretended to be pleased with him—indeed, she would have liked Mr. Saunders under any other circumstances.

Presently he exclaimed:

"By my halidome, I'm hot! My kingdom for a long, tall ice-cream soda!"

And Uncle Charlie said:

"Well, why don't you go and get one? The drug store's just two blocks around the corner."

"A happy suggestion," said Mr. Saunders. He turned to Aunt Isabel. "Will you join me?"

"Indeed I will," she answered. "I'm stifling."

Then Mr. Saunders looked at Missy.

"And *you*, fair maid?"

Missy thought a cool soda would taste good.

At the drug store, the three of them sat on tall stools before the white marble counter, and quaffed heavenly cold soda from high glasses in silver-looking flaskets. "Poor Charlie! He likes soda, so," remarked Aunt Isabel.

"Why not take him some?"

Missy didn't know you could do that, but the drug store man said it would be all right.

Then they all started home again, Aunt Isabel carrying the silver-looking flasket.

It was when they were about half-way, that Aunt Isabel suddenly exclaimed:

"Do you know, I believe I could drink another soda? I feel hotter than ever—and it looks so good!"

"Why not drink it, then?" asked Mr. Saunders.

"Oh, no," said Aunt Isabel.

"Do," he insisted. "We can go back and get another."

"Well, I'll take a taste," she said.

On the words, she lifted the flasket to her lips and took a long draught. Then Mr. Saunders, laughing, caught it from her, and *he* took a long draught.

Missy felt a wave of icy horror sweep down her spine. She wanted to cry out in protest. For, even while she stared at them, at Aunt Isabel in pink organdie and Mr. Saunders in blue serge dividing the flasket of soda between them, a vision presented itself clearly before her eyes:

La Beale Isoud slenderly tall in a straight girdled gown of grey-green velvet, head thrown back so that her filleted golden hair brushed her shoulders, violet eyes half-closed, and an "antique"-looking flasket clasped in her two slim hands; and Sir Tristram so imperiously dark and handsome in his crimson, fur-trimmed doublet, his two hands stretched out and

gripping her two shoulders, his black eyes burning as if to look through her closed lids—the magical love-potion . . . love that never would depart for weal neither for woe. . . .

Missy closed her eyes tight, as if fearing what they might behold in the flesh. But when she opened them again, Aunt Isabel was only gazing into the drained flasket with a rueful expression.

Then they went back and got another soda for Uncle Charlie. And poor Uncle Charlie, unsuspecting, seemed to enjoy it.

During the remainder of that evening Missy was unusually subdued. She realized, of course, that there were no love-potions nowadays; that they existed only in the Middle Ages; and that the silver flasket contained everyday ice-cream soda. And she wasn't sure she knew exactly what the word "symbol" meant, but she felt that somehow the ice-cream soda, shared between them, was symbolic of that famous, fateful drink. She wished acutely that this second episode, so singularly parallel, hadn't happened.

She was still absorbed in gloomy meditations when Mr. Saunders arose to go.

"Oh, it's early yet," protested Uncle Charlie—dear, kind, ignorant Uncle Charlie!

"But I've got to catch the ten-thirty-five," said Mr. Saunders.

"Why can't you stay over till to-morrow night," suggested Aunt Isabel. She had risen, too, and now put her hand on Mr. Saunders's sleeve; her face

looked quite pleading in the moonlight. "There's to be a dance in Odd Fellows' Hall."

"I'd certainly love to stay." He even dared to take hold of her hand openly. "But I've got to be in Paola in the morning, and Blue Mound next day."

"The orchestra's coming down from Macon City," she cajoled.

"Now, don't make it any harder for me," begged Mr. Saunders, smiling down at her.

Aunt Isabel petulantly drew away her hand.

"You're selfish! And Charlie laid up and all!"

Mr. Saunders outspread his hands in a helpless gesture.

"Well, you know the hard lot of the knight of the road—here to-day, gone to-morrow, never able to stay where his heart would wish!"

Missy caught her breath; how *incautiously* he talked!

After Mr. Saunders was gone, Aunt Isabel sat relapsed in her porch chair, very quiet. Missy couldn't keep her eyes off of that lovely, apathetic figure. Once Aunt Isabel put her hand to her head.

"Head hitting it up again?" asked Uncle Charlie solicitously.

Aunt Isabel nodded.

"You'd better get to bed, then," he said. And, despite his wounded toe, he wouldn't let her attend to the shutting-up "chores," but, accompanied by Missy, hobbled around to all the screen doors himself. Poor Uncle Charlie!

It was hard for Missy to get to sleep that night. Her brain was a dark, seething whirlpool. And the air seemed to grow thicker and thicker; it rested heavily on her hot eyelids, pressed suffocatingly against her throat. And when, finally, she escaped her thoughts in sleep, it was only to encounter them again in troubled dreams.

She was awakened abruptly by a terrific noise. Oh, Lord! what was it? She sat up. It sounded as if the house were falling down. Then the room, the whole world, turned suddenly a glaring, ghostly white—then a sharp, spiteful, head-splitting crack of sound—then heavier, staccato volleys—then a baneful rumble, dying away.

A thunder-storm! Oh, Lord! Missy buried her face in her pillow. Nothing in the world so terrified her as thunder-storms.

She seemed to have lain there ages, scarcely breathing, when, in a little lull, above the fierce swish of rain she thought she heard voices. Cautiously she lifted her head; listened. She had left her door open for air and, now, she was sure she heard Uncle Charlie's deep voice. She couldn't hear what he was saying. Then she heard Aunt Isabel's voice, no louder than Uncle Charlie's but more penetrating; it had a queer note in it—almost as if she were crying. Suddenly she *did* cry out!—And then Uncle Charlie's deep grumble again.

Missy's heart nearly stopped beating. Could it be that Uncle Charlie had found out?—That he was accusing Aunt Isabel and making her cry? But sure-

ly they wouldn't quarrel in a thunder-storm! Lightning might hit the house, or anything!

The conjunction of terrors was too much for Missy to bear. Finally she crept out of bed and to the door. An unmistakable moan issued from Aunt Isabel's room. And then she saw Uncle Charlie, in bath-robe and pajamas, coming down the hall from the bathroom. He was carrying a hot-water bottle.

"Why, what's the matter, Missy?" he asked her. "The storm frighten you?"

Missy nodded; she couldn't voice those other horrible fears which were tormenting her.

"Well, the worst is over now," he said reassuringly. "Run back to bed. Your aunt's sick again—I've just been filling the hot-water bottle for her."

"Is she—very sick?" asked Missy tremulously.

"Pretty sick," answered Uncle Charlie. "But there's nothing you can do. Jump back into bed."

So Missy crept back, and listened to the gradual steadying down of the rain. She was almost sorry, now, that the whirlwind of frantic elements had subsided; that had been a sort of terrible complement to the whirlwind of anguish within herself.

She lay there tense, strangling a desperate impulse to sob. La Beale Isoud had died of love—and now Aunt Isabel was already sickening. She half-realized that people don't die of love nowadays—that happened only in the Middle Ages; yet, there in the black stormy night, strange, horrible fancies overruled the sane convictions of daytime. It was fearfully significant, Aunt Isabel's sickening so quick-

ly, so mysteriously. And immediately after Mr. Saunders's departure. That was exactly what La Beale Isoud always did whenever Sir Tristram was obliged to leave her; Sir Tristram was continually having to flee away, a kind of knight of the road, too—to this battle or that tourney or what-not—"here to-day, gone to-morrow, never able to stay where his heart would wish."

"*Oh! oh!*"

At last exhaustion had its way with the taut, quivering little body; the hot eyelids closed; the burning cheek relaxed on the pillow. Missy slept.

When she awoke, the sun, which is so blithely indifferent to sufferings of earth, was high up in a clear sky. The new-washed air was cool and sparkling as a tonic. Missy's physical being felt more refreshed than she cared to admit; for her turmoil of spirit had awakened with her, and she felt her body should be in keeping.

By the time she got dressed and downstairs, Uncle Charlie had breakfasted and was about to go down town. He said Aunt Isabel was still in bed, but much better.

"She had no business to drink all those sodas," he said. "Her stomach was already upset from all that ice-cream and cake the night before—and the hot weather and all—"

Missy was scarcely listening to the last. One phrase had caught her ear: "Her stomach upset!" —How *could* Uncle Charlie?

But when she went up to Aunt Isabel's room later,

the latter reiterated that unromantic diagnosis. But perhaps she was pretending. That would be only natural.

Missy regarded the convalescent; she seemed quite cheerful now, though wan. And not so lovely as she generally did. Missy couldn't forbear a leading remark.

"I'm terribly sorry Mr. Saunders had to go away so soon." She strove for sympathetic tone, but felt inexpert and self-conscious. "Terribly sorry. I can't—"

And then, suddenly, Aunt Isabel laughed—*laughed!*—and said a surprising thing.

"What! *You*, too, Missy? Oh, that's too funny!"

Missy stared—reproach, astonishment, bewilderment, contending in her expression.

Aunt Isabel continued that delighted gurgle.

"Mr. Saunders is a notorious heart-breaker—but I didn't realize he was capturing yours so speedily!"

Striving to keep her dignity, Missy perhaps made her tone more severe than she intended.

"Well," she accused, "didn't he capture *yours*, Aunt Isabel?"

Then Aunt Isabel, still laughing a little, but with a serious shade creeping into her eyes, reached out for one of Missy's hands and smoothed it gently between her own.

"No, dear; I'm afraid your Uncle Charlie has *that* too securely tucked away."

Something in Aunt Isabel's voice, her manner, her eyes, even more than her words, convinced Missy

that she was speaking the real truth. It was all a kind of wild jumbled day-dream she'd been having. La Beale Aunt Isabel wasn't in love with Mr. Saunders after all! She was in love with Uncle Charlie. There had been no romantic undermeaning in all that harp-ukelele business, in the flasket of ice-cream soda, in the mysterious sickness. The sickness wasn't even mysterious any longer. Aunt Isabel had only had an "upset."

Deeply stirred, Missy withdrew her hand.

"I think I forgot to open my bed to air," she said, and hurried away to her own room. But, oblivious of the bed, she stood for a long time at the window, staring out at nothing.

Yes; Romance had died out in the Middle Ages. . . .

She was still standing there when the maid called her to the telephone. It was Raleigh Peters on the wire, asking to take her to the dance that night. She accepted, but without enthusiasm. Where were the thrills she had expected to experience while receiving the homage paid a visiting girl? He was just a grocery clerk named Peters!

Yes; Romance had died out in the Middle Ages. . . .

She felt very blasé as she hung up the receiver.

V

In the Manner of the Duchess

IT was raining—a gentle, trickling summer rain, when, under a heap of magazines near a heavenly attic window, Missy and Tess came upon the paper-backed masterpieces of "The Duchess."

The volume Missy chanced first to select for reading was entitled "Airy Fairy Lilian." The very first paragraph was arresting:

> Down the broad oak staircase—through the silent hall—into the drawing-room runs Lilian, singing as she goes. The room is deserted; through the half-closed blinds the glad sunshine is rushing, turning to gold all on which its soft touch lingers, and rendering the large, dull, handsome apartment almost comfortable . . .

"Broad oak staircase"—"drawing-room"—"large, dull, handsome apartment"—oh, wonderful!

Then on to the description of the alluring heroine:

> . . . the face is more than pretty, it is lovely—the fair, sweet, childish face, framed in by its yellow hair; her great velvety eyes, now misty through vain longing, are blue as the skies above her; her nose is pure Greek; her forehead low, but broad, is partly shrouded by little wandering threads of gold that every now and then break loose from bondage, while her lashes, long and dark, curl upward from her eyes, as though hating to conceal the beauty of the exquisite azure within. . . . There is a certain haughtiness about her that contrasts curious-

ly but pleasantly with her youthful expression and laughing, kissable mouth. She is straight and lissome as a young ash tree; her hands and feet are small and well-shaped; in a word, she is *chic* from the crown of her fair head down to her little arched instep . . .

Missy sighed; how wonderful it must be to be a creature so endowed by the gods!

Missy—Melissa—now, at the advanced age of fifteen, had supposed she knew all the wonders of books. She had learned to read the Book of Life: its enchantments, so many and so varied in Cherryvale, had kept her big grey eyes wide with smiles or wonder or, just occasionally, darkened with the mystery of sorrow. There was the reiterant magic of greening spring; and the long, leisurely days of delicious summer; the companionship of a quaint and infinitely interesting baby brother, and of her own cat—majesty incarnate on four black legs; and then, just lately, this exciting new "best friend," Tess O'Neill. Tess had recently moved to Cherryvale, and was "different"—different even from Kitty Allen, though Missy had suffered twinges about letting anyone displace Kitty. But—

And, now, here it was in Tess's adorable attic (full of treasures discarded by departed tenants of the old Smith place) that Missy turned one of Life's milestones and met "the Duchess."

Missy had loved to read the Bible (good stories there, and beautiful words that made you tingle solemnly); and fairy tales never old; and, almost best of all, the Anthology, full of poetry, that made you

feel a strange live spirit back of the wind and a world of mysteries beyond the curtain of the sky.

But *this*—

The lure of letters was turned loud and seductive as the Blue Danube played on a golden flute by a boy king with his crown on!

Tess glanced up from her reading.

"How's *your* book?" she enquired.

"Oh, it's wonderful," breathed Missy.

"Mine, too. Here's a description that reminds me a little of you."

"*Me?*" incredulously.

"Yes. It's about the heroine—Phyllis. She's not pretty, but she's got a strange, underlying charm."

Missy held her breath. She was ashamed to ask Tess to read the description of the strangely charming heroine, but Tess knew what friendship demanded, and read:

"'I am something over five-feet-two, with brown hair that hangs in rich chestnut tresses far below my waist.'"

"Oh," put in Missy modestly, while her heart palpitated, "*my* hair is just mouse-coloured."

"No," denied Tess authoritatively, "you've got nut-brown locks. And your eyes, too, are something like Phyllis's eyes—great grey eyes with subtle depths. Only yours haven't got saucy hints in them."

Missy wished her eyes included the saucy hints. However, she was enthralled by Tess's comparison, though incomplete. Was it possible Tess was right?

Missy wasn't vain, but she'd heard before that she had "beautiful eyes." Perhaps Tess *was* right. Missy blushed and was silent. Just then, even had she known the proper reply to make, she couldn't have voiced it. As "the Duchess" might have phrased it, she was "naturally covered with confusion."

But already Tess had flitted from the delightfully embarrassing theme of her friend's looks.

"Wouldn't it be grand," she murmured dreamily, "to live in England?"

"Yes—grand," murmured Missy in response.

"Everything's so—so baronial over there."

Baronial!—as always, Tess had hit upon the exact word. Missy sighed again. She had always loved Cherryvale, always been loyal to it; but no one could accuse Cherryvale of being "baronial."

That evening, when Missy went upstairs to smooth her "nut-brown locks" before supper, she gazed about her room with an expression of faint dissatisfaction. It was an adequate, even pretty room, with its flowered wall-paper and lace curtains and bird's-eye maple "set"; and, by the window, a little drop-front desk where she could sit and write at the times when feeling welled in her till it demanded an outlet.

But, now, she had an inner confused vision of "lounging-chairs" covered with pale-blue satin; of velvet, spindle-legged tables hung with priceless lace and bearing Dresden baskets smothered in flowers. Oh, beautiful! If only to her, Missy, such habitation might ever befall!

However, when she started to "brush up" her hair, she eyed it with a regard more favourable than usual. "Rich chestnut tresses!" She lingered to contemplate, in the mirror, the great grey eyes which looked back at her from their subtle depths. She had a suspicion the act was silly, but it was satisfying.

That evening at the supper-table marked the beginning of a phase in Missy's life which was to cause her family bewilderment, secret surmise, amusement and some anxiety.

During the meal she talked very little. She had learned long ago to keep her thoughts to herself, because old people seldom understand you. Often they ask embarrassing questions and, even if they don't laugh at you, you have the feeling they may be laughing inside. Her present thoughts were so delectable and engrossing that Missy did not always hear when she was spoken to. Toward the end of the meal, just as she caught herself in the nick of time about to pour vinegar instead of cream over her berries, mother said:

"Well, Missy, what's the day-dream this time?"

Missy felt her cheeks "crimson with confusion." Yesterday, at such a question, she would have made an evasive answer; but now, so much was she one with the charming creature of her thoughts, she forgot to be cautious. She cast her mother a pensive glance from her great grey eyes.

"I don't know—I just feel sort of *triste*."

"Tristy?" repeated her astonished parent, using Missy's pronunciation.

"Yes—sad, you know."

"My goodness! What makes you sad?"

But Missy couldn't answer that. Unexpected questions often bring unexpected answers, and not till after she'd made use of the effective new word, did Missy pause to ponder whether she was really sad or not. But, now, she couldn't very well admit her lack of the emotion, so she repeated the pensive glance.

"Does one ever know *why* one's sad?" she asked in a bewitchingly appealing tone.

"Well, I imagine that sometimes one does," put in Aunt Nettie, drily.

Missy ignored Aunt Nettie; often it was best to ignore Aunt Nettie—she was mother's old-maid sister, and she "understood" even less than mother did.

Luckily just then, Marguerite, the coloured hired girl, came to clear off the table. Missy regarded her capable but undistinguished figure.

"I wish they had butlers in Cherryvale," she observed, incautious again.

"Butlers!—for mercy's sake!" ejaculated Aunt Nettie.

"What books have you got out from the library now, Missy?" asked father.

It was an abrupt change of topic, but Missy was glad of the chance to turn from Aunt Nettie's derisive smile.

"Why—let me see. 'David Harum' and 'The History of Ancient Greece'—that's all I think. And

oh, yes—I got a French dictionary on my way home this afternoon."

"Oh! A French dictionary!" commented father.

"It isn't books, Horace," remarked Aunt Nettie, incomprehensibly. "It's that O'Neill girl."

"*What's* that O'Neill girl?" demanded Missy, in a low, suppressed voice.

"Well, if you ask me, her head's full of—"

But a swift gesture from mother brought Aunt Nettie to a sudden pause.

But Missy, suspecting an implied criticism of her friend, began with hauteur:

"I implore you to desist from making any insinuation against Tess O'Neill. I'm very proud to be *épris* with her!" (Missy made the climactic word rhyme with "kiss.")

There was a little hush after this outburst from the usually reserved Missy. Father and mother stared at her and then at each other. But Aunt Nettie couldn't refrain from a repetition of the climactic word:

"E-priss!" And she actually giggled!

At the sound, Missy felt herself growing "deathly white, even to the lips"; yet she managed to maintain a mien of intense composure.

"What does that mean, Missy?" queried father.

He was regarding her kindly, with no hint of hidden amusement. Father was a tall, quiet and very wise man, and Missy had sometimes found it possible to talk with him about the unusual things that

rose up to fascinate her. She didn't distrust him so much as most grown-ups.

So she smiled at him and said informatively:

"It means to be in intense sympathy with."

"Oh, I see. Did you find that in the French dictionary?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I see we'll all have to be taking up foreign languages if we're to have such an accomplished young lady in the house."

He smiled at her in a way that made her almost glad, for a moment, that he was her father instead of a Duke who might surround her with baronial magnificence. Mother, too, she couldn't help loving, though, in her neat, practical gingham dress, she was so unlike Lady Chetwoode, the mother in "Airy Fairy Lilian." Lady Chetwoode wore dainty caps, all white lace and delicate ribbon bows that matched in colour her trailing gown. Her small and tapering hands were covered with rings. She walked with a slow, rather stately step, and there was a benignity about her that went straight to the heart. . . . Well, there was something about mother, too, that went straight to the heart. Missy wouldn't trade off her mother for the world.

But when, later, she wandered into the front parlour, she couldn't help wishing it were a "drawing-room." And when she moved on out to the side porch, she viewed with a certain discontent the peaceful scene before her. Usually she had loved the side porch at the sunset hour: the close fragrance of

honeysuckles which screened one end, the stretch of slick green grass and the nasturtium bed aflame like an unstirring fire, the trees rustling softly in the evening breeze—yes, she loved it all for the very tranquillity, the poignant tranquillity of it.

But that was before she realized there were in the world vast swards that swept beyond pleasure-grounds (what *were* "pleasure-grounds"?), past laughing brooklets and gurgling streams, on to the Park where roamed herds of many-antlered deer and where mighty oaks flung their arms far and wide; while mayhap, on a topmost branch, a crow swayed and swung as the soft wind rushed by, making an inky blot upon the brilliant green, as if it were a patch upon the alabaster cheek of some court belle . . .

Oh, enchanting!

But there were no vast swards nor pleasure-grounds nor Parks of antlered deer in Cherryvale.

Then Poppylinda, the majestic black cat, trod up the steps of the porch and rubbed herself against her mistress's foot, as if saying, "Anyhow, *I'm* here!"

Missy reached down and lifted Poppy to her lap. She adored Poppy; but she couldn't help reflecting that a Skye terrier (though she had never seen one) was a more distinguished kind of pet than a black cat. A black cat was—well, *bourgeois* (the last rhyming with "boys"). Airy fairy Lilian's pet was a Skye. It was named Fifine, and was very frisky. Lilian, as she sat exchanging sprightly *badinage*

with her many admirers, was wont to sit with her hand *perdu* beneath the silky Fifine in her lap.

"No, no, Fifine! Down, sir!" murmured Missy absently.

Poppy, otherwise immobile, blinked upward an inquiring gaze.

"Naughty Fifine! You *must* not kiss my fingers, sir!"

Poppy blinked again. Who might this invisible Fifine be? Her mistress was conversing in a very strange manner; and the strangest part of it was that she was looking straight into Poppy's own eyes.

Poppy didn't know it, but her name was no longer Poppylinda. It was Fifine.

That night Missy went to bed in her own little room in Cherryvale; but, strange as it may seem to you, she spent the hours till waking far across the sea, in a manor-house in baronial England.

After that, for a considerable period, only the body, the husk of her, resided in Cherryvale; the spirit, the pulsing part of her, was in the land of her dreams. Events came and passed and left her unmarked. Even the Evans elopement brought no thrill; the affair of a youth who clerks in a bank and a girl who works in a post office is tame business to one who has been participating in the panoplied romances of the high-born.

Missy lived, those days, to dream in solitude or to go to Tess's where she might read of further enchantments. Then, too, at Tess's, she had a *confidante*, a kindred spirit, and could speak out of what

was filling her soul. There is nothing more satisfying than to be able to speak out of what is filling your soul. The two of them got to using a special parlance when alone. It was freely punctuated with phrases so wonderfully camouflaged that no Frenchman would have guessed that they were French.

"Don't I hear the *frou-frou* of silken skirts?" inquired Missy one afternoon when she was in Tess's room, watching her friend comb the golden tresses which hung in rich profusion about her shoulders.

"It's the *mater*," answered Tess. "She's dressed to pay some visits to the gentry. Later she's to dine at the vicarage. She's ordered out the trap, I believe."

"Oh, not the governess-cart?"

Yes, Tess said it *was* the governess-cart; and her answer was as solemn as Missy's question.

It was that same "dinner" at the "vicarage"—in Cherryvale one dines at mid-day, and the Presbyterian minister blindly believed he had invited the O'Neills for supper—that gave Tess one of her most brilliant inspirations. It came to her quite suddenly, as all true inspirations do. The Marble Hearts would give a dinner-party!

The Marble Hearts were Missy's "crowd," thus named after Tess had joined it. Of course, said Tess, they must have a name. A fascinating fount of ideas was Tess's. She declared, now, that they *must* give a dinner-party, a regular six o'clock function. Life for the younger set in Cherryvale was so *bourgeois*, so *ennuyé*. It devolved upon herself and Missy

to elevate it. So, at the next meeting of the crowd, they would broach the idea. Then they'd make all the plans; decide on the date and decorations and menu, and who would furnish what, and where the *fête* should be held. Perhaps Missy's house might be a good place. Yes. Missy's dining room was large, with the porch just outside the windows—a fine place for the orchestra.

Missy listened eagerly to all the earlier features of the scheme—she knew Tess could carry any point with the crowd; but about the last suggestion she felt misgivings. Mother had very strange, old-fashioned notions about some things. She *might* be induced to let Missy help give an evening dinner-party, though she held that fifteen-year-old girls should have only afternoon parties; but to be persuaded to lend her own house for the affair—that would be an achievement even for Tess!

However miracles continue to happen in this cut-and-dried world. When the subject was broached to Missy's mother with carefully considered tact, she bore up with puzzling but heavenly equanimity. She looked thoughtfully at the two girls in turn, and then gazed out the window.

"A six o'clock dinner-party, you say?" she repeated, her eyes apparently fixed on the nasturtium bed.

"Yes, Mrs. Merriam." It was Tess who answered. Missy's heart, an anxious lump in her throat, hindered speech.

"For heaven's sake! What next?" ejaculated Aunt Nettie.

Mrs. Merriam regarded the nasturtiums for a second longer before she brought her eyes back to the two young faces and broke the tense hush.

"What made you think you wanted to give a dinner-party?"

Oh, rapture! Missy's heart subsided an inch, and she drew a long breath. But she wisely let Tess do the replying.

"Oh, everything in Cherryvale's so *passé* and *ennuyé*. We want to do something novel—something really *distingué*—if you know what I mean."

"I believe I do," replied Mrs. Merriam gravely.

"Dis-tinn-gwy!" repeated Aunt Nettie. "Well, if you ask me—" But Mrs. Merriam silenced her sister with an unobtrusive gesture. She turned to the two petitioners.

"You think an evening dinner would be—distinngwy?"

"Oh, yes—the way we've planned it out!" affirmed Tess. She, less diffident than Missy, was less reserved in her disclosures. She went on eagerly: "We've got it all planned out. Five courses: oyster cocktails; Waldorf salad; veal loaf, Saratoga chips, devilled eggs, dill pickles, mixed pickles, chow-chow and peach pickles; heavenly hash; and ice-cream with three kinds of cake. And small cups of *demi-tasse*, of course."

"Three kinds of cake?"

"Well," explained Tess, "you see Beula and Beth and Kitty all want cake for their share—they say their mothers won't be bothered with anything else.

We're dividing the menu up between us, you know."

"I see. And what have you allotted to Missy?"

Missy herself found courage to answer this question; Mother's grave inquiries were bringing her intense relief.

"I thought maybe I could furnish the heavenly hash, Mother."

"Heavenly hash?" Mother looked perplexed. "What's that?"

"I don't know," admitted Missy. "But I liked the name—it's so alluring. Beulah suggested it—I guess she knows the recipe."

"I think it's all kinds of fruit chopped together," volunteered Tess.

"But aren't you having a great deal of fruit—and pickles?" suggested Mrs. Merriam mildly.

"Oh, well," explained Tess, rather grandly, "at a swell function you don't have to have many substantial viands, you know."

"Oh, I nearly forgot—this is to be a swell function."

"Yes, the real thing," said Tess proudly. "Potted palms and hand-painted place-cards and orchestra music and candle shades and everything!"

"Candle shades?—won't it be daylight at six o'clock?"

"Well, then, we'll pull down the window shades," said Tess, undisturbed. "Candle-light 'll add—"

Aunt Nettie, who couldn't keep still any longer, cut in:

"Will you tell me where you're going to get an orchestra?"

"Oh," said Tess, with an air of patience, "we're going to fix the date on a band-practice night. I guess they'd be willing to practice on your porch if we gave them some ice-cream and cake."

"My word!" gasped Aunt Nettie.

"Music always adds so much *éclat* to an affair," pursued Tess, unruffled.

"The band practicing 'll add a-clatter, all right," commented Aunt Nettie, adding a syllable to Tess's triumphant word.

Missy, visioning the seductive scene of Tess's description, did not notice her aunt's sarcasm.

"If only we had a butler!" she murmured dreamily.

Aunt Nettie made as if to speak again, but caught an almost imperceptible signal from her sister.

"Surely, Mary," she began, "you don't mean to say you're—"

Another almost imperceptible gesture.

"Remember, Nettie, that when there's poison in the system, it is best to let it out as quickly as possible."

What on earth was Mother talking about?

But Missy was too thrilled by the leniency of her mother's attitude to linger on any side-question—anyway, grown-ups were always making incomprehensible remarks. She came back swiftly to the important issue.

"And may we really have the party here, Mother?"

Mother smiled at her, a rather funny kind of smile.

"I guess so—the rest of us may as well have the benefit."

What did Mother mean? . . .

But oh, rapture!

Tess and Missy wrote the invitations themselves and decided to deliver them in person, and Missy had no more prevision of all that decision meant than Juliet had when her mother concluded she would give the ball that Romeo butted in on.

Tess said they must do it with *empressement*, meaning she would furnish an equipage for them to make their rounds in. Her father was a doctor, and had turned the old Smith place into a sanitarium; and, to use the Cherryvale word, he had several "rigs." However, when the eventful day for delivery arrived, Tess discovered that her father had disappeared with the buggy while her mother had "ordered out" the surrey to take some ladies to a meeting of the Missionary Society.

That left only an anomalous vehicle, built somewhat on the lines of a victoria, in which Tim, "the coachman" (in Cherryvale *argot* known as "the hired man"), was wont to take convalescent patients for an airing. Tess realized the possible lack of dignity attendant upon having to sit in the driver's elevated seat; but she had no choice, and consoled herself by terming it "the box."

A more serious difficulty presented itself in the matter of suitable steeds. One would have preferred a tandem of bright bays or, failing these, spirited ponies chafing at the bit and impatiently tossing

their long, waving manes. But one could hardly call old Ben a steed at all, and he proved the only animal available that afternoon. Ben suffered from a disability of his right rear leg which caused him to raise his right haunch spasmodically when moving. The effect was rhythmic but grotesque, much as if Ben thought he was turkey-trotting. Otherwise, too, Ben was unlovely. His feet were by no means dainty, his coat was a dirty looking dappled-white, and his mane so attenuated it needed a *toupee*. As if appreciating his defects, Ben wore an apologetic, almost timid, expression of countenance, which greatly belied his true stubbornness of character.

Not yet aware of the turn-out they must put up with, about two o'clock that afternoon Missy set out for Tess's house. She departed unobtrusively by the back door and side gate. The reason for this almost surreptitious leave-taking was in the package she carried under her arm. It held her mother's best black silk skirt, which boasted a "sweep"; a white waist of Aunt Nettie's; a piece of Chantilly lace which had once been draped on mother's skirt but was destined, to-day, to become a "mantilla"; and a magnificent "willow plume" snipped from Aunt Nettie's Sunday hat. This plume, when tacked to Missy's broad leghorn, was intended to be figuratively as well as literally the crowning feature of her costume.

Tess, too, had made the most of her mother's absence at the Missionary Society. Unfortunately Mrs. O'Neill had worn her black silk skirt, but her

blue dimity likewise boasted a "sweep." A bouquet of artificial poppies (plucked from a hat of "the mater's") added a touch of colour to Tess's corsage. And she, also, had acquired a "willow plume."

Of course it was Tess who had thought to provide burnt matches and an extra poppy—artificial. The purpose of the former was to give a "shadowy look" under the eyes; of the latter, moistened, to lend a "rosy flush" to cheek and lip.

Missy was at first averse to these unfamiliar aids to beauty.

"Won't it make your face feel sort of queer—like it needed washing?" she demurred.

"Don't talk like a *bourgeois*," said Tess.

Missy applied the wet poppy.

At the barn, "the coachman" was luckily absent, so Tess could harness up her steed without embarrassing questions. At the sight of the steed of the occasion, Missy's spirits for a moment sagged a bit; nor did old Ben present a more impressive appearance when, finally, he began to turkey-trot down Maple Avenue. His right haunch lifted—fell—lifted—fell, in irritating rhythm as his bulky feet clumped heavily on the macadam. Tess had insisted that Missy should occupy the driver's seat with her, though Missy wanted to recline luxuriously behind, perhaps going by home to pick up Poppy—that is, Fifine—to hold warm and *perdu* in her lap. But practical Tess pointed out that such an act might attract the attention of Mrs. Merriam and bring the adventure to an end.

They proceeded down Maple Avenue. It was Tess's intention to turn off at Silver Street, to leave the first *carte d'invitation* at the home of Mr. Raymond Bonner. These documents were proudly scented (and incidentally spotted) from Mrs. O'Neill's cologne bottle.

Young Mr. Bonner resided in one of the handsomest houses in Cherryvale, and was himself the handsomest boy in the crowd. Besides, he had more than once looked at Missy with soft eyes—the girls "teased" Missy about Raymond. It was fitting that Raymond should receive the first *billet doux*. So, at the corner of Maple and Silver, Tess pulled the rein which should have turned Ben into the shady street which led to Raymond's domicile. Ben moved his head impatiently, and turkey-trotted straight ahead. Tess pulled the rein more vigorously; Ben twitched his head still more like a swear word and, with a more pronounced shrug of his haunch, went undivertingly onward.

"What's the matter?" asked Missy. "Is Ben a little—wild?"

"No—I don't think so," replied Tess, but her tone was anxious. "I guess that it's just that he's used to Tim. Then I'm sort of out of practice driving."

"Well, we can just as well stop at Lester's first, and come back by Raymond's."

But when Tess attempted to manœuvre Ben into Lester's street, Ben still showed an inalienable and masterful preference for Maple Avenue. Doggedly ahead he pursued his turkey-trotting course, un-

mindful of tuggings, coaxings, or threats, till, suddenly, at the point where Maple runs into the Public Square, he made a turn into Main so abrupt as to send the inner rear wheel up onto the curb.

"My!" gasped Missy, regaining her balance. "He *is* wild, isn't he? Do you think, maybe—"

She stopped suddenly. In front of the Post Office and staring at them was that new boy she had heard about—it must be he; hadn't Kitty Allen seen him and said he was a brunette? Even in her agitated state she could but notice that he was of an unusual appearance—striking. He somewhat resembled Archibald Chesney, one of airy fairy Lilian's suitors. Like Archibald, the stranger was tall and eminently gloomy in appearance. His hair was of a rare blackness; his eyes were dark—a little indolent, a good deal passionate—smouldering eyes! His eyebrows were arched, which gave him an air of melancholy protest against the world in general. His nose was of the high-and-mighty order that comes under the denomination of aquiline, or hooked, as may suit you best. However he did not shade his well-cut mouth with a heavy, drooping moustache as did Archibald, for which variation Missy was intensely grateful. Despite Lilian's evident taste for moustached gentlemen, Missy didn't admire these "hirsute adornments."

She made all these detailed observations in the second before blond Raymond Bonner, handsomer but less interesting-looking than the stranger, came out of the Post Office, crying:

"Hello, girls! What's up?—joined the circus?"

This bantering tone, these words, were disconcerting. And before, during their relentless progress down Maple Avenue, the expressions of certain people sitting out on front porches or walking along the street, had occasioned uncertainty as to their unshadowed *empressement.* Still no doubts concerning her own personal get-up had clouded Missy's mind. And the dark Stranger was certainly regarding her with a look of interest in his indolent eyes. Almost you might say he was staring. It must be admiration of her toilette. She was glad she was looking so well—she wished he might hear the *frou-frou* of her silken skirt when she walked!

The consciousness of her unusually attractive appearance made Missy's blood race intoxicatingly. It made her feel unwontedly daring. She did an unwontedly daring thing. She summoned her courage and returned the Strange Boy's stare—full. But she was embarrassed when she found herself looking away suddenly—blushing. Why couldn't she hold that gaze?—why must she blush? Had he noticed her lack of *savoir-faire?* More diffidently she peeped at him again to see whether he had. It seemed to her that his expression had altered. It was a subtle change; but, somehow, it made her blush again. And turn her eyes away again—more quickly than before. But there was a singing in her brain. The dark, interesting-looking Stranger *liked* her to look at him—*liked* her to blush and look away!

She felt oddly light-headed—like someone un-

known to herself. She wanted to laugh and chatter about she knew not what. She wanted to—

But here certain external happenings cruelly grabbed her attention. Old Ben, who had seemed to slow down obligingly upon the girls' greeting of Raymond, had refused to heed Tess's tugging effort to bring him to a standstill. To be sure, he moved more slowly, but move he did, and determinedly; till—merciful heaven!—he came to a dead and purposeful halt in front of the saloon. Not "a saloon," but "the saloon!"

Now, more frantically than she had urged him to pause, Tess implored Ben to proceed. No local standards are so hide-bound as those of a small town, and in Cherryvale it was not deemed decently permissible, but disgraceful, to have aught to do with liquor. "The saloon" was far from a "respectable" place even for men to visit; and for two girls to drive up openly—brazenly—

"Get up, Ben! Get up!" rang an anguished duet.

Missy reached over and helped wallop the rains. Oh, this pain!—this faintness! She now comprehended the feeling which had so often overcome the fair ladies of England when enmeshed in some frightful situation. They, on such upsetting occasions, had usually sunk back and murmured:

"Please ring the bell—a glass of wine!" And Missy, while reading, had been able to vision herself, in some like quandary, also ordering a "glass of wine"; but, now! . . . the wine was only too terribly at hand!

"Get up!—there's a good old Ben!"

"Good old Ben—get up!'

But he was not a good old Ben. He was a mean old Ben—mean with inborn, incredibly vicious stubbornness. How terrible to live to come to this! But Missy was about to learn what a tangled web Fate weaves, and how amazingly she deceives sometimes when life looks darkest. Raymond and the Stranger (Missy knew his name was Ed Brown; alas! but you can't have everything in this world) started forth to rescue at the same time, knocked into each other, got to Ben's head simultaneously, and together tugged and tugged at the bridle.

Ben stood planted, with his four huge feet firmly set, defying any force in heaven or earth to budge them. His head, despite all the boys could do, maintained a relaxed attitude—a contradiction in terms justified by the facts—and also with a certain sidewise inclination toward the saloon. It was almost as if he were watching the saloon door.

In truth, that is exactly what old Ben was doing. He was watching for Tim. Ben had good reason for knowing Tim's ways since, for a considerable time, no one save Tim had deigned to drive him. Besides having a natural tendency toward being "set in his ways," Ben had now reached the time of life when one, man or beast, is likely to become a creature of habit. Thus he had unswervingly followed Tim's route to Tim's invariable first halt; and now he stood waiting Tim's reappearance through the saloon door.

Other volunteer assistants, in hordes, hordes, and laughing as if this awful calamity were a huge joke, had joined Raymond and the Other. Missy was flamingly aware of them, of their laughter, their stares, their jocular comments.

But they all achieved nothing; and relief came only when Ben's supreme faith was rewarded when Tim, who had been spending his afternoon off in his favourite club, was attracted from his checker-game in the "back room" by some hubbub in the street and came inquisitively to the front door.

Ben, then, pricked his ears and showed entire willingness to depart. Tim, after convincing himself that he wasn't drunk and "seeing things," climbed up on the "box"; the two girls, "naturally covered with confusion," were only too glad to sink down unobtrusively into the back seat. Not till they were at the sanitarium again, did they remember the undelivered invitations; but quickly they agreed to put on stamps and let Tim take them, without *empressement*, to the Post Office.

All afternoon Missy burned and chilled in turn.

Oh, it was too dreadful! What would people *say?* What would her parents, should they hear, *do?* And what, oh what would the interesting-looking Stranger *think?* Oh, what a *contretemps!*

If she could have heard what the Stranger actually did say, she would still have been "covered with confusion"—though of a more pleasurable kind. He and Raymond were become familiar acquaintances by this time.

"What's the matter with 'em?" he had inquired as the steed Ben turkey-trotted away. "Doing it on a bet or something?"

"Dunno," replied Raymond. "The blonde one's sort of bughouse, anyway. And the other one, Missy Merriam, gets sorta queer streaks sometimes—you don't know just what's eating her. She's sorta funny, but she's a peach, all right."

"She the one with the eyes?"

Raymond suddenly turned and stared at the new fellow.

"Yes," he assented, almost reluctantly.

"*Some* eyes!" commented the other, gazing after the vanishing equipage.

Raymond looked none too pleased. But it was too late, now, to spike Fate's spinning wheel. Missy was terribly cast down by the afternoon's history; but not so cast down that she had lost sight of the obligation to invite to her dinner a boy who had rescued her—anyhow, he had *tried* to rescue her, and that was the same thing. So a *carte* must be issued to "Mr. Ed Brown." After all, what's in a name?—hadn't Shakespeare himself said that?

At supper, Missy didn't enjoy her meal. Had father or mother heard? Once she got a shock: she glanced up suddenly and caught father's eyes on her with a curious expression. For a second she was sure he knew; but he said nothing, only looked down again and went on eating his chop.

That evening mother suggested that Missy go to bed early.

"You didn't eat your supper, and you look tired out," she explained.

Missy did feel tired—terribly tired; but she wouldn't have admitted it, for fear of being asked the reason. Did mother, perhaps, *know?* Missy had a teasing sense that, under the placid, commonplace conversation, there was something unspoken. A curious and uncomfortable feeling. But, then, as one ascertains increasingly with every year one lives, Life is filled with curious and often uncomfortable feelings. Which, however, one would hardly change if one could, because all these things make Life so much more complex, therefore more interesting. The case of Ben was in point: if he had not "cut up," it might have been weeks before she got acquainted with the Dark Stranger!

Still pondering these "deep" things, Missy took advantage of her mother's suggestion and went up to undress. She was glad of the chance to be alone.

But she wasn't to be alone for yet a while. Her mother followed her and insisted on helping unfasten her dress, turning down her bed, bringing some witch-hazel to bathe her forehead—a dozen little pretexts to linger. Mother did not always perform these offices. Surely she must suspect. Yet, if she did suspect, why her kindness? Why didn't she speak out, and demand explanations?

Mothers are sometimes so mystifying!

The time for the good night kiss came and went with no revealing word from either side. The kiss was unusually tender, given and received. Left

alone at last, on her little, moon-whitened bed, Missy reflected on her great fondness for her mother. No; she wouldn't exchange her dear mother, not even for the most aristocratic lady in England.

Then, as the moon worked its magic on her fluttering lids, the flowered wall-paper, the bird's-eye maple furniture, all dissolved in air, and in their place magically stood, faded yet rich, lounges and chairs of velvet; priceless statuettes; a few bits of *bric-à-brac* worth their weight in gold; several portraits of beauties well-known in the London and Paris worlds, frail as they were fair, false as they were *piquante;* tobacco-stands and meerschaum pipes and cigarette-holders; a couple of dogs snoozing peacefully upon the hearth-rug; a writing-table near the blazing grate and, seated before it—

Yes! It was *he!* Though the room was Archibald Chesney's "den," the seated figure was none other than Ed Brown! . . .

A shadow falls across the paper on which he is writing—he glances up—beholds an airy fairy vision regarding him with a saucy smile—a slight graceful creature clothed in shell-pink with daintiest lace frillings at the throat and wrists, and with a wealth of nut-brown locks brought low on her white brow, letting only the great grey eyes shine out.

"What are you writing, sir?" she demands, sending him a bewitching glance.

"Only a response to your gracious invitation, Lady Melissa," he replies, springing up to kiss her tapering fingers.

. . . The moon seals the closed eyelids down with a kiss.

The day of days arrived.

Missy got up while the rest of the household was still sleeping. For once she did not wait for Poppy's kiss to awaken her. The empty bed surprised and disconcerted Poppy—that is, Fifine—upon her appearance. But much, these days, was happening to surprise and disconcert Poppy—that is, Fifine.

Fifine finally located her mistress down in the back parlour, occupied with shears and a heap of old magazines. Missy was clipping sketches from certain advertisements, which she might trace upon cardboard squares and decorate with water-colour. These were to be the "place-cards"—an artistic commission Missy had put off from day to day till, now, at the last minute, she was constrained to rise early, with a rushed and remorseful feeling. A situation familiar to many artists.

She succeeded in concentrating herself upon the work with the greatest difficulty. For, after breakfast, there began a great bustling with brooms and carpet-sweepers and dusters; and, no sooner was the house swept than appeared a gay and chattering swarm to garnish it: "Marble Hearts" with collected "potted palms" and "cut flowers" and cheesecloth draperies of blue and gold—the "club colours" which, upon the sudden need for club colours, had been suddenly adopted.

Missy betook herself to her room, but it was filled

up with two of the girls and a bolt of cheesecloth; to the dining room, but there was no inspiration in the sight of Marguerite polishing the spare silver; to the side porch, but one cannot work where giggling girls sway and shriek on tall ladders, hanging paper-lanterns; to the summerhouse, but even to this refuge the Baby followed her, finally upsetting the water-colour box.

The day went rushing past. Enticing odours arose from the kitchen. The grocery wagon came, and came again. The girls went home. A sketchy lunch was eaten off the kitchen table, and father stayed down town. The girls reappeared. They overran the kitchen, peeling oranges and pineapples and bananas for "heavenly hash." Marguerite grew cross. The Baby, who missed his nap, grew cross. And Missy, for some reason, grew sort of cross, too; she resented the other girls' unrestrainable hilarity. They wouldn't be so hilarious if it were their own households they were setting topsy-turvy; if *they* had sixteen "place-cards" yet to finish. In England, the hostess's entertainments went more smoothly. Things were better arranged there.

Gradually the girls drifted home to dress; the house grew quiet. Missy's head was aching. Flushed and paint-daubed, she bent over the "place-cards."

Mother came to the door.

"Hadn't you better be getting dressed, dear?—it's half-past five."

Half-past five! Heavens! Missy bent more fe-

verishly over the "place-cards"; there were still two left to colour.

"I'll lay out your dotted Swiss for you," offered mother kindly.

At this mention of her "best dress," Missy found time for a pang of vain desire. She wished she had a more befitting dinner gown. A black velvet, perhaps; a "picture dress" with rare old lace, and no other adornment save diamonds in her hair and ears and round her throat and wrists.

But, then, velvet might be too hot for August. She visioned herself in an airy creation of batiste—very simple, but the colour combination a ravishing mingling of palest pink and baby-blue, with ribbons fluttering; delicately tinted long gloves; delicately tinted slippers and silken stockings on her slender, high-arched feet; a few glittering rings on her restless fingers; one blush-pink rose in her hair which, simply arranged, suffered two or three stray rippling locks to wander wantonly across her forehead.

"*Missy!* It's ten minutes to six! And you haven't even combed your hair!" It was mother at the door again.

The first guests arrived before Missy had got her hair "smoothed up"—no time, to-night, to try any rippling, wanton effects. She could hear the swelling sound of voices and laughter in the distance—oh, dreadful! Her fingers became all thumbs as she sought to get into the dotted swiss, upside down.

Mother came in just in time to extricate her, and

buttoned the dress with maddeningly deliberate fingers.

"Now, don't fret yourself into a headache, dear," she said in a voice meant to be soothing. "The party won't run away—just let yourself relax."

Relax!

The musicians, out on the side porch, were already beginning their blaring preparations when the hostess, at last, ran down the stairs and into the front parlour. Her agitation had no chance to subside before they must file out to the dining room. Missy hadn't had time before to view the completely embellished dining room and, now, in all its glory and grandeur, it struck her full force: the potted palms screening the windows through which floated strains of music, streamers of blue and gold stretching from the chandelier to the four corners of the room in a sort of canopy, the long white table with its flowers and gleaming silver—

It might almost have been the scene of a function at Chetwoode Manor itself!

In a kind of dream she was wafted to the head of the table; for, since the function was at her house, Missy had been voted the presiding place of honour. It is a very great responsibility to sit in the presiding place of honour. From that conspicuous position one leads the whole table's activities: conversing to the right, laughing to the left, sharply on the lookout for any conversational gap, now and then drawing muted *tête-à-têtes* into a harmonic unison. She is, as it were, the leader of an orchestra of which

the individual diners are the subsidiary instruments. Upon her watchful resourcefulness hangs the success of a dinner-party. But Missy, though a trifle fluttered, had felt no anxiety; she knew so well just how Lady Chetwoode had managed these things.

The hostess must also, of course, direct the nutrimental as well as the conversational process of the feast. She is served first, and takes exactly the proper amount of whatever viand in exactly the proper way and manipulates it with exactly the proper fork or knife or spoon. But Missy had felt no anticipatory qualms.

She was possessed of a strange, almost a light-headed feeling. Perhaps the excitement of the day, the rush at the last, had something to do with it. Perhaps the spectacle of the long, adorned table, the scent of flowers, the sound of music, the dark eyes of Mr. Edward Brown who was seated at her right hand.

(Dear old faithful Ben!—to think of how his devotion to tippling Tim had brought Edward Brown into her life!)

She felt a stranger to herself. Something in her soared intoxicatingly. The sound of her own gay chatter came to her from afar—as from a stranger. Mr. Brown kept on looking at her.

The butler appeared, bringing the oyster cocktails (a genteel delicacy possible in an inland midsummer thanks to the canning industry), and proceeded to serve them with *empressement.*

The butler was really the climactic triumph of the

event. And he was Missy's own inspiration. She had been racking her brains for some way to eliminate the undistinguished Marguerite, to conjure through the very strength of her desire some approach to a proper servitor. If only they had *one* of those estimable beings in Cherryvale! A butler, preferably elderly, and "steeped in respectability" up to his port-wine nose; one who would hover around the table, adjusting this dish affectionately and straightening that, and who, whenever he left the room, left it with a velvet step and an almost inaudible sigh of satisfaction . . .

And then, quite suddenly, she had hit upon the idea of "Snowball" Saunders. Snowball had come to the house to borrow the Merriams' ice-cream freezer. There was to be an informal "repast" at the Shriners' hall, and Snowball engineered all the Shriners' gustatory festivities from "repasts" to "banquets." Sometimes, at the banquets, he even wore a dress suit. It was of uncertain lineage and too-certain present estate, yet it was a dress suit. It was the recollection of the dress suit that had given Missy her inspiration. To be sure, in England, butlers were seldom "coloured," but in Cherryvale one had to make some concessions.

The butler was wearing his dress suit as he came bearing the oyster cocktails.

"Hello, Snowball!" greeted Raymond Bonner, genially. "Didn't know you were invited to-night."

Snowball!—what a *gosherie!* With deliberate *hauteur* Missy spoke:

"Oh, Saunders, don't forget to fill the glasses with ice-water."

Raymond cast her an astonished look, but, perhaps because he was more impressed by the formality of the function than he would have admitted, refrained from any bantering comment.

The hostess, then, with a certain righteous complacence, lowered her eyes to her cocktail glass.

Oh, heavens!

It was the first time, so carried away had she been with this new, intoxicating feeling, that she had really noticed what she was eating—how she was eating it.

She was eating her oysters with her after-dinner coffee spoon!

The tiny-pronged oyster fork was lying there on the cloth, untouched!

Oh, good heavens!

An icy chill of mortification crept down her spine, spread out through her whole being. She had made a mistake—*she*, the hostess!

A whirlwind of mortal shame stormed round and round within her. If only she could faint dead away in her chair! If only she could weep, and summon mother! Or die! Or even if she could sink down under the table and hide away from sight. But she didn't know how to faint; and hostesses do not weep for their mothers; and, in real life, people never die at the crucial moments; nor do they crawl under tables. All she could do was to force herself,

at last, to raise her stricken eyelids and furtively regard her guests.

Oh, dear heaven!

They were all—*all* of them—eating their oyster cocktails with their after-dinner coffee spoons!

Missy didn't know why, at that sight, she had to fight off a spasm of laughter. She felt she must scream out in laughter, or die.

All at once she realized that Mr. Brown was speaking to her.

"What's the matter?" he was saying. "Want to sneeze?"

That struck her so funny that she laughed; and then she felt better.

"I was just terribly upset," she found herself explaining almost naturally, "because I suddenly found myself eating the oyster cocktail with the coffee spoon."

"Oh, isn't this the right implement?" queried Mr. Brown, contemplating his spoon. "Well, if you ask *me*, I'm glad you started off with it—this soupy stuff'd be the mischief to get away with with a fork."

Archibald Chesney wouldn't have talked that way. But, nevertheless, Missy let her eyelids lift up at him in a smile.

"I'm glad you didn't know it was a mistake," she murmured. "I was *terribly* mortified."

"Girls are funny," Mr. Brown replied to that. "Always worrying over nothing." He returned her smile. "But *you* needn't ever worry."

What did he mean by that? But something in his

dark eyes, gazing at her full, kept Missy from asking the question, made her swiftly lower her lashes.

"I bet *you* could start eating with a toothpick and get away with it," he went on.

Did he mean her social *savoir-faire*—or did he mean—

Just then the butler appeared at her left hand to remove the cocktail course. She felt emboldened to remark, with an air of ease:

"Oh, Saunders, don't forget to lay the spoons when you serve the *demi-tasses*."

Mr. Brown laughed.

"Oh, say!" he chortled, "you *are* funny when you hand out that highfalutin stuff!"

No; he surely hadn't meant admiration for her *savoir-faire;* yet, for some reason, Missy didn't feel disappointed. She blushed, and found it entrancingly difficult to lift her eyelids.

The function, rather stiffly and quite impressively, continued its way without further *contretemps*. It was, according to the most aristocratic standards, highly successful. To be sure, after the guests had filed solemnly from the table and began to dance on the porches, something of the *empressement* died away; but Missy was finding Mr. Brown too good a dancer to remember to be critical. She forgot altogether, now, to compare him with the admired Archibald.

Missy danced with Mr. Brown so much that Raymond Bonner grew openly sulky. Missy liked Raymond, and she was sure she would never want to

do anything unkind—yet why, at the obvious ill temper of Raymond Bonner, did she feel a strange little delicious thrill?

Oh, she was having a glorious time!

Once she ran across father, lurking unobtrusively in a shadowed corner.

"Well," he remarked, "I see that Missy's come back for a breathing-spell."

Just what did father mean by that?

But she was having too good a time to wonder long. Too good a time to remember whether or not it was in the baronial spirit. She was entirely uncritical when, the time for good nights finally at hand, Mr. Brown said to her:

"Well, a fine time was had by all! I guess I don't have to tell *you* that—what?"

Archibald Chesney would never have put it that way. Yet Missy, with Mr. Brown's eyes upon her in an openly admiring gaze, wouldn't have had him changed one bit.

But, when at last sleep came to her in her little white bed, on the silvery tide of the moon, it carried a dream to slip up under the tight-closed eyes. . . .

The ball is at its height. The door of the conservatory opens and a fair young creature steals in. She is fairer than the flowers themselves as, with a pretty consciousness of her own grace, she advances into the bower. Her throat is fair and rounded under the diamonds that are no brighter than her own great grey eyes; her nut-brown locks lie in heavy masses

on her well-shaped head, while across her forehead a few rebellious tresses wantonly wander.

She suddenly sees in the shadows that other figure which has started perceptibly at her entrance; a tall and eminently gloomy figure, with hair of a rare blackness, and eyes dark and *insouciant* but admiring withal.

With a silken *frou-frou* she glides toward him, happy and radiant, for she is in her airiest mood tonight.

"Is not my dress charming, Mr. Brown?" she cries with charming *naïveté*. "Does it not become me?"

"It is as lovely as its wearer," replied the other, with a suppressed sigh.

"Pouf! What a simile! Who dares compare me with a paltry gown?"

Then, laughing at his discomfiture, the coquette, with slow *nonchalance*, gathers up her long train.

"But I'll forgive you—this once," she concedes, "for there is positively no one to take poor little me back to the ballroom."

And Lady Melissa slips her hand beneath Mr. Brown's arm, and glances up at him with laughing, friendly eyes. . . .

VI

Influencing Arthur

NO one in Cherryvale ever got a word from Melissa about the true inwardness of the spiritual renaissance she experienced the winter that the Reverend MacGill came to the Methodist church; naturally not her father nor mother nor Aunt Nettie, because grown-ups, though nice and well-meaning, with their inability to "understand," and their tendency to laugh make one feel shy and reticent about the really deep and vital things. And not even Tess O'Neill, Missy's chum that year, a lively, ingenious, and wonderful girl, was in this case clever enough to obtain complete confidence.

Once before Missy had felt the flame divine—a deep, vague kind of glow all subtly mixed up with "One Sweetly Solemn Thought" and such slow, stirring, minor harmonies, and with sunlight stealing through the stained-glass window above the pulpit in colourful beauty that pierced to her very soul. But that was a long time ago, when she was a little thing —only ten. Now she was nearly sixteen. Things were different. One now was conscious of the reality of inward inexperiences: these must influence life—one's own and, haply, the lives of others. What

Missy did not emphasize in her mind was the mystery of how piety evolved from white fox furs and white fox furs finally evolved from piety. But she did perceive that it would be hopeless to try to explain her motives about Arthur as mixed up with the acquisition of the white fox furs. . . No; not even Tess O'Neill could have grasped the true inwardness of it all.

It all began, as nearly as one could fix on a concrete beginning, with Genevieve Hicks's receiving a set of white fox furs for Christmas. The furs were soft and silky and luxurious, and Genevieve might well have been excused for wearing them rather triumphantly. Missy wasn't at all envious by nature and she tried to be fair-minded in this case, but she couldn't help begrudging Genevieve her regal air. Genevieve had paraded her becoming new finery past the Merriam residence on several Sunday afternoons, but this wasn't the entire crux of Missy's discontent. Genevieve and the white fox furs were escorted by Arthur Summers.

Now, Arthur had more than once asked Missy herself to "go walking" on Sunday afternoons. But Mrs. Merriam had said Missy was too young for such things. And when Missy, in rebuttal, once pointed out the promenading Genevieve, Mrs. Merriam had only replied that Genevieve's mother ought to know better—that Genevieve was a frivolous-minded girl, anyway.

Missy, peering through the parlour lace curtains, made no answer; but she thought:

"Bother! *Everybody* can go walking but me!"

Then she thought:

"She's laughing awful loud. She *is* frivolous-minded."

Then:

"He looks as if he's having a good time, too; he's laughing back straight at her. I wonder if he thinks she's very pretty."

And then:

"I wish *I* had some white fox furs."

That evening at the supper-table Missy voiced her desire. There were just the four of them at the table—father, mother, Aunt Nettie and herself. Missy sat silent, listening to the talk of the grown-ups; but their voices floated to her as detached, far-off sounds, because she was engrossed in looking at a mental picture; a red-haired, laughing, admiring-eyed boy walking along beside a girl in white fox furs—and the girl was not Genevieve Hicks. The delights of the vision must have reflected in her face because finally her father said:

"Well, Missy, what's all the smiling about?"

Missy blushed as if she'd been caught in mischief; but she answered, wistfully rather than hopefully:

"I was just thinking how nice it would be if I had some white fox furs."

"For heaven's sake!" commented mother. "When you've already got a new set not two months old!"

Missy didn't reply to that; she didn't want to seem unappreciative. It was true she had a new set, warm and serviceable, but—well, a short-haired, dark-

brown collarette hasn't the allure of a fluffy, snow-white boa.

Mother was going on: "That ought to do you two winters at least—if not three."

"I don't know what the present generation is coming to," put in Aunt Nettie with what seemed to Missy entire irrelevance. Aunt Nettie was a spinster, even older than Missy's mother, and her lack of understanding and her tendency to criticize and to laugh was especially dreaded by her niece. "Nowadays girls still in knee-skirts expect to dress and act like society belles!"

"I wasn't *expecting* the white fox furs," said Missy defensively. "I was just thinking how nice it would be to have them." She was silent a moment, then added: "I think if I had some white fox furs I'd be the happiest person in the world."

"That doesn't strike me as such a large order for complete happiness," observed father, smiling at her.

Missy smiled back at him. In another these words might have savoured of irony, but Missy feared irony from her father less than from any other old person. Father was a big, silent man but he was always kind and particularly lovable; and he "understood" better than most "old people."

"What is the special merit of these white fox furs?" he went on, and something in the indulgent quality of his tone, something in the expression of his eyes, made hope stir timidly to birth in her bosom and rise to shine from her eyes.

But before she could answer, mother spoke.

"*I* can tell you that. That flighty Hicks girl went by here this afternoon wearing some. That Summers boy who clerks in Pieker's grocery was with her. He once wanted Missy to go walking with him and I had to put my foot down. She doesn't seem to realize she's too young for such things. Her brown furs will do her for this season—and next season too!"

Mother put on a stern, determined kind of look, almost hard. Into the life of every woman who is a mother there comes a time when she learns, suddenly, that her little girl is trying not to be a little girl any longer but to become a woman. It is a hard moment for mothers, and no wonder that they seem unwarrantedly adamantine. Mrs. Merriam instinctively knew that wanting furs and wanting boys spelled the same evil. But Missy, who was fifteen instead of thirty-seven and whose emotions and desires were still as hazy and uncorrelated as they were acute, stared with bewildered hurt at this unjust harshness in her usually kind parent.

Then she turned large, pleading eyes upon her father; he had shown a dawning interest in the subject of white fox furs. But Mr. Merriam, now, seemed to have lost the issue of furs in the newer issue of boys.

"What's this about the Summers boy?" he demanded. "It's the first *I've* ever heard of this business."

"He only wanted me to go walking, father. All the rest of the girls go walking with boys."

"Indeed! Well, *you* wont. Nor for a good many years!"

Such unexpected shortness and sharpness from father made her feel suddenly wretched; he was even worse than mother.

"Who is he, anyway?" he exploded further.

Missy's lips were twitching inexplicably; she feared to essay speech, but it was mother who answered.

"He's that red-headed boy who clerks in Pieker's grocery."

"Arthur's a nice boy," Missy then attempted courageously. "I don't think he ought to be blamed just because he's poor and—"

Her defence ended ignominiously in a choking sound. She wasn't one who cried easily and this unexpected outburst amazed herself; she could not, to have saved her life, have told why she cried.

Her father reached over and patted her hand.

"I'm not blaming him because he's poor, daughter. It's just that I don't want you to start thinking about the boys for a long while yet. Not about Arthur or any other boy. You're just a little girl."

Missy knew very well that she was not "just a little girl," but she knew, too, that parents nourish many absurd ideas. And though father was now absurd, she couldn't help feeling tender toward him when he called her "daughter" in that gentle tone. So, sighing a secret little sigh, she smiled back at him a misty smile which he took for comprehension and a promise.

The subject of white fox furs seemed closed; Missy was reluctant to re-open it because, in some intangible way, it seemed bound up with the rather awkward subject of Arthur.

After supper father conversed with her about a piece she was reading in the Sunday Supplement, and seemed anxious to make her feel happy and contented. So softened was he that, when Tess telephoned and invited Missy to accompany the O'Neill family to the Methodist church that evening, he lent permission to the unusual excursion.

The unusualness of it—the Merriams performed their Sabbath devotions at 11 A.M.—served to give Missy a greater thrill than usually attends going to church. Besides, since the Merriams were Presbyterians, going to the Methodist church held a certain novelty—savouring of entertainment—and diversion from the same old congregation, the same old church choir, and the same old preacher. In literal truth, also, the new Methodist preacher was not old; he was quite young. Missy had already heard reports of him. Some of the Methodist girls declared that though ugly he was perfectly fascinating; and grandpa and grandma Merriam, who were Methodists (as had been her own father before he married mother, a Presbyterian), granted that he was human as well as inspired.

As Missy entered the Methodist church that evening with the O'Neills, it didn't occur to her memory that it was in this very edifice she had once felt the flame divine. It was once when her mother was away

visiting and her less rigidly strict grandparents had let her stay up evenings and attend revival meetings with them. But all that had happened long ago—five years ago, when she was a little thing of ten. One forgets much in five years. So she felt no stir of memory and no presentiment of a coincidence to come.

Reverend MacGill, the new minister, at first disappointed her. He was tall and gaunt; and his face was long and gaunt, lighted with deep-set, smouldering, dark eyes and topped with an unruly thatch of dark hair. Missy thought him terribly ugly until he smiled, and then she wasn't quite so sure. As the sermon went on and his harsh but flexible voice mounted, now and then, to an impassioned height, she would feel herself mounting with it; then when it fell again to calmness, she would feel herself falling, too. She understood why grandma called him "inspired." And once when his smile, on one of its sudden flashes from out that dark gauntness of his face, seemed aimed directly at her she felt a quick, responsive, electric thrill. The Methodist girls were right—he *was* fascinating.

She didn't wait until after the service to express her approbation to Tess—anyway, to fifteen-year-old surreptitiousness seems to add zest to any communication. She tore a corner from the hymnal fly-leaf and scribbled her verdict while the elder O'Neills and most of the old people were kneeling in prayer. Assuring herself that all nearby heads to be dreaded were reverentially bent, she passed the missive. As

she did so she chanced to glance up toward the minister.

Oh, dear heaven! He was looking straight down at her. He had seen her—the O'Neill pew was only three rows back. It was too awful. What would he think of her? An agony of embarrassment and shame swept over her.

And then—could she believe her eyes?—right in the midst of his prayer, his harshly melodious voice rising and falling with never a break—the Reverend MacGill smiled. Smiled straight at her—there could be no mistake. And a knowing, sympathetic, understanding kind of smile! Yes, he was *human.*

She liked him better than she had ever thought it possible to like a minister—especially an ugly one, and one whom she'd never "met."

But after service she "met" him at the door, where he was standing to shake hands with the departing worshippers. As Mrs. O'Neill introduced her, rather unhappily, as "one of Tess's little friends," he flashed her another smile which said, quite plainly: "I saw you up to your pranks, young lady!" But it was not until after Dr. and Mrs. O'Neill had passed on that he said aloud: "That was all right—all I ask is that you don't look so innocent when your hands are at mischief."

Oh, she *adored* his smile!

The following Sunday evening she was invited to the O'Neills' for supper, and the Reverend MacGill was invited too. The knowledge of this interesting meeting impending made it possible for her to view

Genevieve and Arthur, again out on a Sunday afternoon stroll, with a certain equanimity. Genevieve, though very striking and vivacious in her white fox, was indubitably a frivolous-minded girl; she, Missy, was going to eat supper with the Reverend MacGill. Of course white fox furs were nice, and Arthur's eyelashes curled up in an attractive way, but there are higher, more ennobling things in life.

The Reverend MacGill did not prove disappointing on closer acquaintance. Grandpa said he knew everything there is to know about the Bible, but the Reverend MacGill did not talk about it. In a way this was a pity, as his talk might have been instructive, but he got Tess and Missy to talking about themselves instead. Not in the way that makes you feel uncomfortable, as many older people do, but just easy, chatty, laughing comradeship. You could talk to him almost as though he were a boy of the "crowd."

It developed that the Reverend MacGill was planning a revival. He said he hoped that Tess and Missy would persuade all their young friends to attend. As Missy agreed to ally herself with his crusade, she felt a sort of lofty zeal glow up in her. It was a pleasantly superior kind of feeling. If one can't be fashionable and frivolous one can still be pious.

In this noble missionary spirit she managed to be in the kitchen the next time Arthur delivered the groceries from Pieker's. She asked him to attend the opening session of the revival the following Sunday night. Arthur blushed and stammered a

little, so that, since Arthur wasn't given to embarrassment, Missy at once surmised he had a "date." Trying for an impersonal yet urbane and hospitable manner, she added:

"Of course if you have an engagement, we hope you'll feel free to bring any of your friends with you."

"Well," admitted Arthur, "you see the fact is I *have* got a kind of date. Of course if I'd *known*—"

"Oh, that's all right," she cut in with magnificent ease. "I wasn't asking you to go with me. Reverend MacGill just appointed me on a kind of informal committee, you know—I'm asking Raymond Bonner and all the boys of the crowd."

"You needn't rub it in—I get you. Swell chance of *you* ever wanting to make a date!"

His sulkiness of tone, for some reason, gratified her. Her own became even more gracious as she said again: "We hope you can come. And bring any of your friends you wish."

She was much pleased with this sustained anonymity she had given Genevieve.

When the opening night of the Methodist revival arrived, most of the "crowd" might have been seen grouped together in one of the rearmost pews of the church. Arthur and Genevieve were there, Genevieve in her white fox furs, of course. She was giggling and making eyes as if she were at a party or a movie show instead of in church. Missy—who had had to do a great deal of arguing in order to be

present with her, so to speak, guests—preserved a calm, sweet, religious manner; it was far too relentlessly Christian to take note of waywardness. But the way she hung on the words of the minister, joined in song, bowed her head in prayer, should have been rebuke enough to any light conduct. It did seem to impress Arthur; for, looking at her uplifted face and shining eyes, as in her high, sweet treble, she sang, "Throw Out the Life-Line," he lost the point of one of Genevieve's impromptu jokes and failed to laugh in the right place. Genevieve noticed his lapse. She also noticed the reason. She herself was not a whit impressed by Missy's devotions, but she was unduly quiet for several minutes. Then she stealthily tore a bit of leaf from her hymnal—the very page on which she and other frail mortals were adjured to throw out life-lines—and began to fashion it into a paper-wad.

The service had now reached the stage of prayer for repentant sinners. Reverend MacGill was doing the praying, but members of the congregation were interjecting, "Glory Hallelujah!" "Praise be His Name!" and the other worshipful ejaculations which make a sort of running accompaniment on such occasions. Missy thought the interruptions, though proper and lending an atmosphere of fervour, rather a pity because they spoiled the effective rise and fall of the minister's voice. There was one recurrent nasal falsetto which especially threw you off the religious track. It belonged to old Mrs. Lemon. Everybody knew she nagged at and overworked and

half-starved that ragged little Sims orphan she'd adopted, but here she was making the biggest noise of all!

However, much as she wished old Mrs. Lemon to stop, Missy could not approve of what she, just then, saw take place in her own pew.

Genevieve was whispering and giggling again. Missy turned to look. Genevieve pressed a paper-wad into Arthur's hand, whispered and giggled some more. And then, to Missy's horror, Arthur took surreptitious but careful aim with the wad. It landed squarely on old Mrs. Lemon's ear, causing a "Blessed be the Lo—" to part midway in scandalized astonishment. Missy herself was scandalized. Of course old Mrs. Lemon was a hypocrite—but to be hit on the ear while the name of the Saviour was on her lips! Right on the ear! Missy couldn't help mentally noting Arthur's fine marksmanship, but she felt it her duty to show disapproval of a deed so utterly profane.

She bestowed an openly withering look on the desecrators.

"She dared me to," whispered Arthur—the excuse of the original Adam.

Without other comment Missy returned her stern gaze to the pulpit. She held it there steadfast though she was conscious of Genevieve, undaunted, urging Arthur to throw another wad. He, however, refused. That pleased Missy, for it made it easier to fix the blame for the breach of religious etiquette upon Genevieve alone. Of course, it was Genevieve who

was really to blame. She was a frivolous, light-minded girl. She was a bad influence for Arthur.

Yet, when it came time for the "crowd" to disperse and Arthur told her good night as though nothing had happened, Missy deemed it only consistent with dignity to maintain extreme reserve.

"Oh, fudge, Missy! Don't be so stand-offish!" Arthur was very appealing when he looked at you like that—his eyes so mischievous under their up-curling lashes. But Missy made herself say firmly:

"You put me in a rather awkward position, Arthur. You know Reverend MacGill entrusted me to—"

"Oh, come out of it!" interrupted Arthur, grinning.

Missy sighed in her heart. She feared Arthur was utterly unregenerate. Especially, when as he turned to Genevieve—who was tugging at his arm—he gave the Reverend MacGill's missionary an open wink. Missy watched the white fox furs, their light-minded wearer and her quarry all depart together; commiseration for the victim vied with resentment against the temptress. Poor Arthur!

She herself expected to be taken home by the O'Neills, but to her surprise she found her father waiting in the church vestibule. He said he had decided to come and hear the new minister, and Missy never suspected it was the unrest of a father who sees his little girl trying to become a big girl that had dragged him from his house-slippers and smoking-jacket this snowy evening.

They walked homeward through the swirling flakes in silence. That was one reason why Missy enjoyed being with her father—she could be so companionably silent with him. She trudged along beside him, half-consciously trying to match his stride, while her thoughts flew far afield.

But presently father spoke.

"He's very eloquent, isn't he?"

"He?—who?" She struggled to get her thoughts back home.

Her father peered at her through the feathery gloom.

"Why, the preacher—Reverend MacGill."

"Oh, yes." She shook herself mentally. "He's perfectly fasci—" she broke off, remembering she was talking to a grown-up. "He's very inspired," she amended.

Another pause. Again it was father who spoke first.

"Who was the boy who threw the paper-wad?"

Involuntarily Missy's hold on his arm loosened. Then father had seen. That was bad. Doubtless many others had seen—old people who didn't understand the circumstances. It was very bad for Arthur's reputation. Poor Arthur!

"Threw the paper-wad?" she asked back evasively.

"Yes, the red-headed boy. Wasn't it that Summers fellow?"

That Summers fellow!—Arthur's reputation was already gone!

"Wasn't it?" persisted father.

Evasion was no longer possible. Anyway, it might be best to try to explain just how it was—to set poor Arthur right. So she replied:

"Yes, it was Arthur—but it wasn't *his* fault, exactly."

"Not *his* fault? Whose in thunder was it?"

Missy hesitated. She didn't like talking scandal of anyone directly—and, besides, there were likeable traits in Genevieve despite her obvious failings.

"Well," she said, "it's just that Arthur is under a kind of wrong influence—if you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know that influences count for a good deal," answered father in the serious way she loved in him. Father *did* understand more than most grown-ups. And Reverend MacGill was like him in that. She found time fleetingly to wish that Reverend MacGill were in some way related to her. Too bad that he was a little too young for Aunt Nettie; and, perhaps, too old for—she caught herself up, blushing in the dark, as father went on:

"Just what kind of influence is undermining this Arthur fellow?"

She wished he wouldn't keep speaking of Arthur with that damning kind of phrase. It was because she wanted to convince him that Arthur didn't really merit it that she went further in speech than she'd intended.

"Well, he runs around with frivolous, light-minded people. People who lead him on to do things he wouldn't dream of doing if they'd let him alone. It isn't his fault if he's kind of—kind of dissipated."

She paused, a little awe-stricken herself at this climactic characterization of poor, misguided Arthur; she couldn't have told herself just how she had arrived at it. A little confusedly she rushed on: "He ought to have uplifting, ennobling influences in his life—Arthur's at heart an awfully nice boy. That's why I wanted mother to let me go walking with him. Don't you think that—maybe—if she understood—she might let me?"

How in the world had that last question ever popped out? How had she worked up to it? A little appalled, a little abashed, but withal atingle at her own daring, she breathlessly, even hopefully, awaited his answer.

But father ruthlessly squashed her hopes with two fell sentences and one terrifying oath.

"I should say not! You say he's dissipated and then in the same breath ask me—for God's sake!"

"Well, maybe, he isn't so dissipated, father," she began quaveringly, regretting the indiscretion into which eloquence had enticed her.

"I don't care a whoop whether he is or not," said father heartlessly. "What I want is for you to get it into your head, once for all, that you're to have *nothing* to do with this fellow or any other boy!"

Father's voice, usually so kind, had the doomsday quality that even mother used only on very rare occasions. It reverberated in the depths of Missy's being. They walked the last block in unbroken silence. As they passed through the gate, walked up the front path, shook the snow off their wraps on

the porch, and entered the cosy-lighted precincts of home, Missy felt that she was the most wretched, lonely, misunderstood being in the world.

She said her good nights quickly and got off upstairs to her room. As she undressed she could hear the dim, faraway sound of her parents' voices. The sound irritated her. They pretended to love her, but they seemed to enjoy making things hard for her! Not only did they begrudge her a good time and white fox furs and everything, but they wouldn't let her try to be a good influence to the world! What was the use of renouncing earthly vanities for yourself if you couldn't help others to renounce them, too? Of course there was a certain pleasure, a kind of calm, peaceful satisfaction, an ecstasy even, in letting the religious, above-the-world feeling take possession of you. But it was selfish to keep it all to yourself. It was your duty to pass it on, to do good works—to throw out the life-line. And they begrudged her *that*—it wasn't right. Were all parents as hard and cruel as hers?

She felt like crying; but, just then, she heard them coming up the stairs. It would be difficult to explain her tears should one of them look into her room on some pretext; so she jumped quickly into bed. And, sure enough, she heard the door open. She shut her eyes. She heard her mother's voice: "Are you asleep, dear?" Impossible to divine that under that tender voice lay a stony heart! She emitted a little ghost of a snore; she heard the door close again, very softly.

For a while she lay quiet but she felt so unlike sleep that, finally, she crept out of bed, groped for her blanket wrapper, and went over to the window. It had stopped snowing and everything shone palely in ghostly white. The trees were white-armed, gleaming skeletons, the summerhouse an eerie pagoda or something, the scurrying clouds, breaking now and showing silver edges from an invisible moon, were at once grand and terrifying. It was all very beautiful and mysterious and stirring. And something in her stretched out, out, out—to the driving clouds, to the gleaming, brandishing boughs, to the summerhouse so like something in a picture. And, as her soul stretched out to the beauty and grandeur and mystery of it all, there came over her a feeling of indefinable ecstasy, a vague, keen yearning to be really good in every way. Good to her Lord, to her father and mother and Aunt Nettie and little brother, to the Reverend MacGill with his fascinating smile and good works, to everybody—the whole town—the whole world. Even to Genevieve Hicks, though she seemed so self-satisfied with her white fox furs and giggling ways and utter worldliness—yet, there were many things likeable about Genevieve if you didn't let yourself get prejudiced. And Missy didn't ever want to let herself get prejudiced—narrow and harsh and bigoted like so many Christians. No; she wanted to be a sweet, loving, generous, helpful kind of Christian. And to Arthur, too, of course. There must be *some* way of helping Arthur.

She found herself, half-pondering, half-praying:

"How can I help Arthur, dear Jesus? Please help me find some way—so that he won't go on being light-minded and liking light-mindedness. How can I save him from his ways—maybe he *is* dissipated. Maybe he smokes cigarettes! Why does he fall for light-mindedness? Why doesn't he feel the real beauty of services?—the rumbling throb of the organ, and the thrill of hearing your own voice singing sublime hymns, and the inspired swell of Reverend MacGill's voice when he prays with such expression? It is real ecstasy when you get the right kind of feeling—you're almost willing to renounce earthly vanities. But Arthur doesn't realize what it *means*. How can I show him, dear Jesus? Because they've forbidden me to have anything to do with him. Would it be right, for the sake of his soul, for me to disobey them—just a little bit? For the sake of his soul, you know. And he's really a nice boy at heart. *They* don't understand just how it is. But I don't think it would be *very* wrong if I talked to him just a little—do you?"

Gradually it came over her that she was chilly; she dragged a comforter from her bed and resumed her kneeling posture by the window and her communings with Jesus and her conscience. Then she discovered she was going off to sleep, so she sprang to her feet and jumped back into bed. A great change had come over her spirit; no longer was there any restlessness, bitterness, or ugly rebellion; no; nothing but peace ineffable. Smiling softly, she slept.

The next morning brought confusion to the Merriam household for father was catching the 8:37 to Macon City on a business trip, Aunt Nettie was going along with him to do some shopping, mother was in bed with one of her headaches, and Missy had an inexplicably sore throat. This last calamity was attributed, in a hurried conclave in mother's darkened room, to Missy's being out in the snow-storm the night before. Missy knew there was another contributory cause, but she couldn't easily have explained her vigil at the window.

"I didn't want her to go to church in the first place," mother lamented.

"Well, she won't go any more," said father darkly. Missy's heart sank; she looked at him with mutely pleading eyes.

"And you needn't look at me like that," he added firmly. "It won't do you the least good."

Missy's heart sank deeper. How could she hope to exert a proper religious influence if she didn't attend services regularly herself? But father looked terribly adamantine.

"I think you'd better stay home from school today," he continued, "it's still pretty blustery."

So Missy found herself spending the day comparatively alone in a preternaturally quiet house—noisy little brother off at school, Aunt Nettie's busy tongue absent, Marguerite, the hired girl, doing the laundry down in the basement. And mother's being sick, as always is the case when a mother is sick, seemed to add an extra heaviness to the pervasive

stillness. The blustery day invited reading, but Missy couldn't find anything in the house she hadn't already read; and she couldn't go to the Public Library because of her throat. And couldn't practice because of mother's head. Time dragged on her hands, and Satan found the mischief—though Missy devoutly believed that it was the Lord answering her prayer.

She was idling at the front-parlour window when she saw Pieker's delivery wagon stop at the gate. She hurried back to the kitchen, telling herself that Marguerite shouldn't be disturbed at her washtubs. So she herself let Arthur in. All sprinkled with snow and ruddy-cheeked and mischievous-eyed, he grinned at her as he emptied his basket on the kitchen table.

"Well," he bantered, "did you pray for my sins last night?"

"You shouldn't make fun of things like that," she said rebukingly.

Arthur chortled.

"Gee, Missy, but you're sure a scream when you get pious!" Then he sobered and, casually—a little too casually, enquired: "Say, I s'pose you're going again to-night?"

Missy regretfully shook her head. "No, I've got a sore throat." She didn't deem it necessary to say anything about parental objections. Arthur looked regretful, too.

"Say, that's too bad. I was thinking, maybe—"

He shuffled from one foot to the other in a way

that to Missy clearly finished his speech's hiatus: He'd been contemplating taking *her* home to-night instead of that frivolous Genevieve Hicks! What a shame! To lose the chance to be a really good influence—for surely getting Arthur to church again, even though for the main purpose of seeing her home, was better than for him not to go to church at all. It is excusable to sort of inveigle a sinner into righteous paths. What a shame she couldn't grasp at this chance for service! But she oughtn't to let go of it altogether; oughtn't to just abandon him, as it were, to his fate. She puckered her brows meditatively.

"I'm not going to church, but—"

She paused, thinking hard. Arthur waited.

An inspiration came to her. "Anyway, I have to go to the library to-night. I've got some history references to look up."

Arthur brightened. The library appealed to him as a rendezvous more than church, anyway. Oh, ye Public Libraries of all the Cherryvales of the land! Winter-time haunt of young love, rivalling band-concerts in the Public Square on summer evenings! What unscholastic reminiscences might we not hear, could book-lined shelves in the shadowy nooks, but speak!

"About what time will you be through at the Library?" asked Arthur, still casual.

"Oh, about eight-thirty," said Missy, not pausing to reflect that it's an inconsistent sore throat that can venture to the Library but not to church.

"Well, maybe I'll be dropping along that way about that time," opined Arthur. "Maybe I'll see you there."

"That would be nice," said Missy, tingling.

She continued to tingle after he had jauntily departed with his basket and clattered away in his delivery wagon. She had a "date" with Arthur. The first real "date" she'd ever had! Then, resolutely she squashed her thrills; she must remember that this meeting was for a Christian cause. The motive was what made it all right for her to disobey—that is, to *seem* to disobey—her parents' commands. They didn't "understand." She couldn't help feeling a little perturbed over her apparent disobedience and had to argue hard with her conscience.

Then, another difficulty presented itself to her mind. Mother had set her foot down on evening visits to the Library—mother seemed to think girls went there evenings chiefly to meet boys! Mother would never let her go—especially in such weather and with a sore throat. Missy pondered long and earnestly.

The result was that, after supper, at which mother had appeared, pale and heavy-eyed, Missy said tentatively:

"Can I run up to Kitty's a little while to see what the lessons are for to-morrow?"

"I don't think you'd better, dear," mother replied listlessly. "It wouldn't be wise, with that throat."

"But my throat's better. And I've *got* to keep

up my lessons, mother! And just a half a block can't hurt me if I bundle up." Missy had formulated her plan well; Kitty Allen had been chosen as an alibi because of her proximity.

"Very well, then," agreed mother.

As Missy sped toward the library, conflicting emotions swirled within her and joined forces with the sharp breathlessness brought on by her haste. She had never before been out alone at night, and the blackness of tree-shadows lying across the intense whiteness of the snow struck her in two places at once—imaginatively in the brain and fearsomely in the stomach. Nor is a guilty conscience a reassuring companion under such circumstances. Missy kept telling herself that, if she *had* lied a little bit, it was really her parents' fault; if they had only let her go to church, she wouldn't have been driven to sneaking out this way. But her trip, however fundamentally virtuous—and with whatever subtly interwoven elements of pleasure at its end—was certainly not an agreeable one. At the moment Missy resolved never, never to sneak off alone at night again.

In the brightly lighted library her fears faded away; she warmed to anticipation again. And she found some very enjoyable stories in the new magazines—she seemed, strangely, to have forgotten about any "history references." But, as the hands on the big clock above the librarian's desk moved toward half-past eight, apprehensions began to rise again. What if Arthur should fail to come? Could

she ever live through that long, terrible trip home, all alone?

Then, just as fear was beginning to turn to panic, Arthur sauntered in, nonchalantly took a chair at another table, picked up a magazine and professed to glance through it. And then, while Missy palpitated, he looked over at her, smiled, and made an interrogative movement with his eyebrows. More palpitant by the second, she replaced her magazines and got into her wraps. As she moved toward the door, whither Arthur was also sauntering, she felt that every eye in the Library must be observing. Hard to tell whether she was more proud or embarrassed at the public *empressement* of her "date."

Arthur, quite at ease, took her arm to help her down the slippery steps.

Arthur wore his air of assurance gracefully because he was so used to it. Admiration from the fair sex was no new thing to him. And Missy knew this. Perhaps that was one reason she'd been so modestly pleased that he had wished to bestow his gallantries upon her. She realized that Raymond Bonner was much handsomer and richer; and that Kitty Allen's cousin Jim from Macon City, in his uniform of a military cadet, was much more distinguished-looking; and that Don Jones was much more humbly adoring. Arthur had red hair, and lived in a boarding-house and drove a delivery-wagon, and wasn't the least bit humble; but he had an audacious grin and upcurling lashes and "a way with

him." So Missy accepted his favour with a certain proud gratitude.

She felt herself the heroine of a thrilling situation though their conversation, as Arthur guided her along the icy sidewalks, was of very ordinary things: the weather—Missy's sore throat (sweet solicitude from Arthur)—and gossip of the "crowd"—the weather's probabilities to-morrow—more gossip—the weather again.

The weather was, in fact, in assertive evidence. The wind whipped chillingly about Missy's short-skirted legs, for they were strolling slowly—the correct way to walk when one has a "date." Missy's teeth were chattering and her legs seemed wooden, but she'd have died rather than suggest running a block to warm up. Anyway, despite physical discomforts, there was a certain deliciousness in the situation, even though she found it difficult to turn the talk into the spiritual trend she had proposed. Finally Arthur himself mentioned the paper-wad episode, laughing at it as though it were a sort of joke.

That was her opening.

"You shouldn't be so worldly, Arthur," she said in a voice of gentle reproof.

"Worldly?" in some surprise.

She nodded seriously over her serviceable, unworldly brown collarette.

"How am I worldly?" he pursued, in a tone of one not entirely unpleased.

"Why—throwing wads in church—lack of respect for religious things—and things like that."

"Oh, I see," said Arthur, his tone dropping a little. "I suppose it was a silly thing to do," he added with a touch of stiffness.

"It was a profane kind of thing," she said, sadly. "Don't you see, Arthur?"

"If I'm such a sinner, I don't see why you have anything to do with me."

It stirred her profoundly that he didn't laugh, scoff at her; she had feared he might. She answered, very gravely:

"It's because I like you. You don't think it's a pleasure to me to find fault with you, do you Arthur?"

"Then why find fault?" he asked good-naturedly.

"But if the faults are *there?*" she persevered.

"Let's forget about 'em, then," he answered with cheerful logic. "Everybody can't be good like *you*, you know."

Missy felt nonplussed, though subtly pleased, in a way. Arthur *did* admire her, thought her "good" —perhaps, in time she could be a good influence to him. But at a loss just how to answer his personal allusion, she glanced backward over her shoulder. In the moonlight she saw a tall man back there in the distance.

There was a little pause.

"I don't s'pose you'll be going to the Library again to-morrow night?" suggested Arthur presently.

"Why, I don't know—why?" But she knew "why," and her knowledge gave her a tingle.

"Oh, I was just thinking that if you had to look up some references or something, maybe I might drop around again."

"Maybe I *will* have to—I don't know just yet," she murmured, confused with a sweet kind of confusion.

"Well, I'll just drop by, anyway," he said. "Maybe you'll be there."

"Yes, maybe."

Another pause. Trying to think of something to say, she glanced again over her shoulder. Then she clutched at Arthur's arm.

"Look at that man back there—following us! He looks something like father!"

As she spoke she unconsciously quickened her pace; Arthur consciously quickened his. He knew —as all of the boys of "the crowd" knew—Mr. Merriam's stand on the matter of beaux.

"Oh!" cried Missy under her breath. She fancied that the tall figure had now accelerated his gait, also. "It *is* father! I'll cut across this vacant lot and get in at the kitchen door—I can beat him home that way!"

Arthur started to turn into the vacant lot with her, but she gave him a little push.

"No! no! It's just a little way—I won't be afraid. You'd better run, Arthur—he might kill you!"

Arthur didn't want to be killed. "So long, then —let me know how things come out!"—and he disappeared fleetly down the block.

Missy couldn't make such quick progress; the va-

cant lot had been a cornfield, and the stubby ground was frozen into hard, sharp ridges under the snow. She stumbled, felt her shoes filling with snow, stumbled on, fell down, felt her stocking tear viciously. She glanced over her shoulder—had the tall figure back there on the sidewalk slowed down, too, or was it only imagination? She scrambled to her feet and hurried on—and *he* seemed to be hurrying again. She had no time, now, to be afraid of the vague terrors of night; her panic was perfectly and terribly tangible. She *must* get home ahead of father.

Blindly she stumbled on.

At the kitchen door she paused a moment to regain her breath; then, very quietly, she entered. There was a light in the kitchen and she could hear mother doing something in the pantry. She sniffed at the air and called cheerily:

"Been popping corn?"

"Yes," came mother's voice, rather stiffly. "Seems to me you've been a long time finding out about those lessons!"

Not offering to debate that question, nor waiting to appease her sudden craving for pop-corn, Missy moved toward the door.

"Get your wet shoes off at once!" called mother.

"That's just what I was going to do." And she hurried up the back stairs, unbuttoning buttons as she went.

Presently, in her night-dress and able to breathe naturally again, she felt safer. But she decided she'd better crawl into bed. She lay there, listening.

It must have been a half-hour later when she heard a cab stop in front of the house, and then the slam of the front door and the sound of father's voice. He had just come in on the 9:23—*that* hadn't been him, after all!

As relief stole over her, drowsiness tugged at her eyelids. But, just as she was dozing off, she was roused by someone's entering the room, bending over her.

"Asleep?"

It was father! Her first sensation was of fear, until she realized his tone was not one to be feared. And, responding to that tenderness of tone, sharp compunctions pricked her. Dear father!—it was horrible to have to deceive him.

"I've brought you a little present from town." He was lighting the gas. "Here!"

Her blinking eyes saw him place a big flat box on the bed. She fumbled at the cords, accepted his proffered pen-knife, and then—oh, dear heaven! There, fluffy, snow-white and alluring, reposed a set of white fox furs!

"S-sh!" he admonished, smiling. "Mother doesn't know about them yet."

"Oh, father!" She couldn't say any more. And the father, smiling at her, thought he understood the emotions which tied her tongue, which underlay her fervent good night kiss. But he could never have guessed all the love, gratitude, repentance, self-abasement and high resolves at that moment welling within her.

He left her sitting up there in bed, her fingers still caressing the silky treasure. As soon as he was gone, she climbed out of bed to kneel in repentant humility.

"Dear Jesus," she prayed, "please forgive me for deceiving my dear father and mother. If you'll forgive me just this once, I promise never, never to deceive them again."

Then, feeling better—prayer, when there is real faith, does lift a load amazingly—she climbed back into bed, with the furs on her pillow.

But she could not sleep. That was natural—so much had happened, and everything seemed so complicated. Everything had been seeming to go against her and here, all of a sudden, everything had turned out her way. She had her white fox furs, much prettier than Genevieve Hicks's—oh, she *did* hope they'd let her go to church next Sunday night so she could wear them! And she'd had a serious little talk with Arthur—the way seemed paved for her to exert a really satisfactory influence over him. As soon as she could see him again— Oh, she wished she might wear the furs to the Library to-morrow night! She wished Arthur could see her in them—

A sudden thought brought her up sharp: she couldn't meet him to-morrow night after all—for she never wanted to deceive dear father again. No, she would never sneak off like that any more. Yet it wouldn't be fair to Arthur to let him go there and wait in vain. She ought to let him know, some way. And she ought to let him know, too, that that man wasn't father, after all. What if he was worrying,

this minute, thinking she might have been caught and punished. It didn't seem right, while *she* was so happy, to leave poor Arthur worrying like that. . . . Oh, she *did* wish he could see her in the furs. . . . Yes, she *ought* to tell him she couldn't keep the "date"—it would be awful for him to sit there in the Library, waiting and waiting. . . .

She kept up her disturbed ponderings until the house grew dark and still. Then, very quietly, she crept out of bed and dressed herself in the dark. She put on her cloak and hat. After a second's hesitation she added the white fox furs. Then, holding her breath, she stole down the back stairs and out the kitchen door.

The night seemed more fearsomely spectral than ever—it must be terribly late; but she sped through the white silence resolutely. She was glad Arthur's boarding-house was only two blocks away. She knew which was his window; she stood beneath it and softly gave "the crowd's" whistle. Waited—whistled again. There was his window going up at last. And Arthur's tousled head peering out.

"I just wanted to let you know I can't come to the Library after all, Arthur! No!—Don't say anything, now!—I'll explain all about it when I get a chance. And that wasn't father—it turned out all right. No, no!—Don't say anything now! Maybe I'll be in the kitchen to-morrow. Good night!"

Then, while Arthur stared after her amazedly, she turned and scurried like a scared rabbit through the white silence.

As she ran she was wondering whether Arthur had got a really good view of the furs in the moonlight; was resolving to urge him to go to church next Sunday night even if *she* couldn't; was telling herself she mustn't *entirely* relinquish her hold on him—for his sake. . . .

So full were her thoughts that she forgot to be much afraid. And the Lord must have been with her, for she reached the kitchen door in safety and regained her own room without detection. In bed once again, a great, soft, holy peace seemed to enfold her. Everything was right with everybody—with father and mother and God and Arthur—everybody.

At the very time she was going off into smiling slumber—one hand nestling in the white fox furs on her pillow—it happened that her father was making half-apologetic explanations to her mother: everything had seemed to come down on the child in a lump—commands against walking and against boys and against going out nights and everything. He couldn't help feeling for the youngster. So he thought he'd bring her the white fox furs she seemed to have set her heart on.

And Mrs. Merriam, who could understand a father's indulgent, sympathetic heart even though—as Missy believed—she wasn't capable of "understanding" a daughter's, didn't have it in her, then, to spoil his pleasure by expounding that wanting furs and wanting beaux were really one and the same evil.

VII

Business of Blushing

MISSY was embroiled in a catastrophe, a tangle of embarrassments and odd complications. Aunt Nettie attributed the blame broadly to "that O'Neill girl"; she asserted that ever since Tess O'Neill had come to live in Cherryvale Missy had been "up to" just one craziness after another. But then Aunt Nettie was an old maid—Missy couldn't imagine her as *ever* having been fifteen years old. Mother, who could generally be counted on for tenderness even when she failed to "understand," rather unfortunately centred on the wasp detail—why had Missy just stood there and let it keep stinging her? And Missy felt shy at trying to explain it was because the wasp was stinging her *leg*. Mother would be sure to remark this sudden show of modesty in one she'd just been scolding for the lack of it—for riding the pony astride and showing her—

Oh, *legs!* Missy was in a terrific confusion, as baffled by certain inconsistencies displayed by her own nature as overwhelmed by her disgraceful predicament. For she was certainly sincere in her craving to be as debonairly "athletic" as Tess; yet, during that ghastly moment when the wasp was . . .

No, she could never explain it to mother. Old people don't understand. Not even to father could she have talked it all out, though he had patted her hand and acted like an angel when he paid for the bucket of candy—that candy which none of them got even a taste of! That Tess and Arthur should eat up the candy which her own father paid for, made one more snarl in the whole inconsistent situation.

It all began with the day Arthur Simpson "dared" Tess to ride her pony into Pieker's grocery store. Before Tess had come to live in the sanitarium at the edge of town where her father was head doctor, she had lived in Macon City and had had superior advantages—city life, to Missy, a Cherryvalian from birth, sounded exotic and intriguing. Then Tess in her nature was far from ordinary. She was characterized by a certain dash and fine flair; was inventive, fearless, and possessed the gift of leadership. Missy, seeing how eagerly the other girls of "the crowd" caught up Tess's original ideas, felt enormously flattered when the leader selected such a comparatively stupid girl as herself as a chum.

For Missy thought she must be stupid. She wasn't "smart" in school like Beulah Crosswhite, nor strikingly pretty like Kitty Allen, nor president of the Iolanthians like Mabel Dowd, nor conspicuously popular with the boys like Genevieve Hicks. No, she possessed no distinctive traits anybody could pick out to label her by—at least that is what she thought. So she felt on her mettle; she wished to prove herself worthy of Tess's high regard.

It was rather strenuous living up to Tess. Sometimes Missy couldn't help wishing that her chum were not quite so alert. Being all the while on the jump, mentally and physically, left you somewhat breathless and dizzy; then, too, it didn't leave you time to sample certain quieter yet thrilling enjoyments that came right to hand. For example, now and then, Missy secretly longed to spend a leisurely hour or so just talking with Tess's grandmother. Tess's grandmother, though an old lady, seemed to her a highly romantic figure. Her name was Mrs. Shears and she had lived her girlhood in a New England seaport town, and her father had been captain of a vessel which sailed to and from far Eastern shores. He had brought back from those long-ago voyages bales and bales of splendid Oriental fabrics —stiff rustling silks and slinky clinging crêpes and indescribably brilliant brocades shot with silver or with gold. For nearly fifty years Mrs. Shears had worn dresses made from these romantic stuffs and she was wearing them yet—in Cherryvale! They were all made after the same pattern, gathered voluminous skirt and fitted bodice and long flowing sleeves; and, with the small lace cap she always wore on her white hair, Missy thought the old lady looked as if she'd just stepped from the yellow-tinged pages of some fascinating old book. She wished her own grandmother dressed like that; of course she loved Grandma Merriam dearly and really wouldn't have exchanged her for the world, yet, in contrast, she did seem somewhat commonplace.

It was interesting to sit and look at Grandma Shears and to hear her recount the Oriental adventures of her father, the sea captain. But Tess gave Missy little chance to do this. Tess had heard and re-heard the adventures to the point of boredom and custom had caused her to take her grandmother's strange garb as a matter of course; Tess's was a nature which craved—and generally achieved—novelty.

Just now her particular interest veered toward athleticism; she had recently returned from a visit to Macon City and brimmed with colourful tales of its "Country Club" life—swimming, golf, tennis, horseback riding, and so forth. These pursuits she straightway set out to introduce into drowsy, behind-the-times Cherryvale. But in almost every direction she encountered difficulties: there was in Cherryvale no place to swim except muddy Bull Creek—and the girls' mothers unanimously vetoed that; and there were no links for golf; and the girls themselves didn't enthuse greatly over tennis those broiling afternoons. So Tess centred on horseback riding, deciding it was the "classiest" sport, after all. But the old Neds and Nellies of the town, accustomed leisurely to transport their various family surreys, did not metamorphose into hackneys of such spirit and dash as filled Tess's dreams.

Even so, these steeds were formidable enough to Missy. She feared she wasn't very athletic. That was an afternoon of frightful chagrin when she came walking back into Cherryvale, ignominiously follow-

ing Dr. O'Neill's Ben. Old Ben, who was lame in his left hind foot, had a curious gait, like a sort of grotesque turkey trot. Missy outwardly attributed her inability to keep her seat to Ben's peculiar rocking motion, but in her heart she knew it was simply because she was afraid. What she was afraid of she couldn't have specified. Not of old Ben surely, for she knew him to be the gentlest of horses. When she stood on the ground beside him, stroking his shaggy, uncurried flanks or feeding him bits of sugar, she felt not the slightest fear. Yet the minute she climbed up into the saddle she sickened under the grip of some increasingly heart-stilling panic. Even before Ben started forward; so it wasn't Ben's rocking, lop-sided gait that was really at the bottom of her fear—it only accentuated it. Why was she afraid of Ben up there in the saddle while not in the least afraid when standing beside him? Fear was very strange. Did everybody harbour some secret, absurd, unreasonable fear? No, Tess didn't; Tess wasn't afraid of anything. Tess was cantering along on rawboned Nellie in beautiful unconcern. Missy admired and envied her dreadfully.

Her sense of her own shortcomings became all the more poignant when the little cavalcade, with Missy still ignominiously footing it in the rear, had to pass the group of loafers in front of the Post Office. The loafers called out rude, bantering comments, and Missy burned with shame.

Then Arthur Simpson appeared in Pieker's doorway next door and grinned.

"Hello! Some steed!" he greeted Tess. "Dare you to ride her in!"

"Not to-day, thanks," retorted Tess insouciantly —that was another quality Missy envied in her friend, her unfailing insouciance. "Wait till I get my new pony next week, and then I'll take you up!"

"All right. The dare holds good." Then Arthur turned his grin to Missy. "What's the matter with *you?* Charger get out of hand?"

The loafers in front of the Post Office took time from their chewing and spitting to guffaw. Missy could have died of mortification.

"Want a lift?" asked Arthur, moving forward.

Missy shook her head. She longed to retrieve herself in the public gaze, longed to shine as Tess shone, but not for worlds could she have essayed that high, dizzy seat again. So she shook her head dumbly and Arthur grinned at her not unkindly. Missy liked Arthur Simpson. He wore a big blue-denim apron and had red hair and freckles—not a romantic figure by any means; but there was a mischievous imp in his eye and a rollicking lilt in his voice that made you like him, anyway. Missy wished he hadn't been a witness to her predicament. Not that she felt at all sentimental toward Arthur. Arthur "went with" Genevieve Hicks, a girl whom Missy privately deemed frivolous and light-minded. Besides Missy herself was, at this time, interested in Raymond Bonner, the handsomest boy in "the crowd." Missy liked good looks—they appealed

to the imagination or something. And she adored everything that appealed to the imagination: there was, for instance, the picture of Sir Galahad, in shining armour, which hung on the wall of her room—for a time she had almost said her prayers to that picture; and there was a compelling mental image of the gallant Sir Launcelot in "Idylls of the King" and of the stern, repressed, silently suffering Guy in "Airy Fairy Lilian." Also there had recently come into her possession a magazine clipping of the boy king of Spain; she couldn't claim that Alphonso was handsome—in truth he was quite ugly—yet there was something intriguing about him. She secretly treasured the printed likeness and thought about the original a great deal: the alluring life he led, the panoply of courts, royal balls and garden-parties and resplendent military parades, and associating with princes and princesses all the time. She wondered, with a little sigh, whether his "crowd" called him by his first name; though a King he was just a boy—about her own age.

Nevertheless, though Arthur Simpson was neither handsome nor revealed aught which might stir vague, deep currents of romance, Missy regretted that even Arthur had seen her in such a sorry plight. She wished he might see her at a better advantage. For instance, galloping up on a spirited mount, in a modish riding-habit—a checked one with flaring-skirted coat and shining boots and daring but swagger breeches, perhaps!—galloping insouciantly up to take that dare!

But she knew it was an empty dream. Even if she had the swagger togs—a notion mad to absurdity—she could never gallop with insouciance. She wasn't the athletic sort.

At supper she was still somewhat bitterly ruminating her failings.

"Missy, you're not eating your omelet," adjured her mother.

Missy's eyes came back from space.

"I was just wondering—" then she broke off.

"Yes, dear," encouraged mother. Missy's hazy thoughts took a sudden plunge, direct and startling.

"I was wondering if, maybe, you'd give me an old pair of father's trousers."

"What on earth for, child?"

"Just an old pair," Missy went on, ignoring the question. "Maybe that pepper-and-salt pair you said you'd have to give to Jeff."

"But what do you *want* of them?" persisted mother. "Jeff needs them disgracefully—the last time he mowed the yard I blushed every time he turned his back toward the street."

"I think Mrs. Allen's going to give him a pair of Mr. Allen's—Kitty said she was. So he won't need the pepper-and-salts."

"But what do *you* want with a pair of *pants?*" Aunt Nettie put in. Missy wished Aunt Nettie had been invited out to supper; Aunt Nettie was relentlessly inquisitive. She knew she must give some kind of answer.

"Oh, just for some fancy-work," she said. She

tried to make her tone insouciant, but she was conscious of her cheeks getting hot.

"Fancy-work—pants for fancy-work! For heaven's sake!" ejaculated Aunt Nettie.

Mother, also, was staring at her in surprise. But father, who was a darling, put in: "Give 'em to her if she wants 'em, dear. Maybe she'll make a lambrequin for the piano or an embroidered smoking-jacket for the old man—*à la* your *Ladies' Home Companion.*"

He grinned at her, but Missy didn't mind father's jokes at her expense so much as most grown-ups'. Besides she was grateful to him for diverting attention from her secret purpose for the pants.

After supper, out in the summerhouse, it was an evening of such swooning beauty she almost forgot the bothers vexing her life. When you sit and watch the sun set in a bed of pastel glory, and let the level bars of thick gold light steal across the soft slick grass to reach to your very soul, and smell the heavenly sweetness of dew-damp roses, and listen to the shrill yet mournful even-song of the locusts—when you sit very still, just letting it all seep into you and through and through you, such a beatific sense of peace surges over you that, gradually, trivial things like athletic shortcomings seem superficial and remote.

Later, too, up in her room, slowly undressing in the moonlight, she let herself yield to the sweeter spell. She loved her room, especially when but dimly lit by soft white strips of the moon through the window. She loved the dotted Swiss curtains blow-

ing, and the white-valanced little bed, and the white-valanced little dressing-table all dim and misty save where a broad shaft of light gave a divine patch of illumination to undress by. She said her prayers on her knees by the window, where she could keep open but unsacrilegious eyes on God's handiwork outside —the divine miracle of everyday things transformed into shimmering glory.

A soft brushing against her ankles told her that Poppylinda, her cat, had come to say good night. She lifted her pet up to the sill.

"See the beautiful night, Poppy," she said. "See! —it's just like a great, soft, lovely, blue-silver bed!"

Poppy gave a gentle purr of acquiescence. Missy was sure it was acquiescence. She was convinced that Poppy had a fine, appreciative, discriminating mind. Aunt Nettie scouted at this; she denied that she disliked Poppy, but said she "liked cats in their place." Missy knew this meant, of course, that inwardly she loathed cats; that she regarded them merely as something which musses up counterpanes and keeps outlandish hours. Aunt Nettie was perpetually finding fault with Poppy; but Missy had noted that Aunt Nettie and all the others who emphasized Poppy's imperfections were people whom Poppy, in her turn, for some reason could not endure. This point she tried to make once when Poppy had been convicted of a felonious scratch, but of course the grown-ups couldn't follow her reasoning. Long since she'd given up trying to make clear the real merits of her pet; she only knew that Poppy was

more loving and lovable, more sympathetic and comprehending, than the majority of humans. She could count on Poppy's never jarring on any mood, whether grave or gay. Poppy adored listening to poetry read aloud, sitting immovable save for slowly blinking eyes for an hour at a stretch. She even had an appreciation for music, often remaining in the parlour throughout her mistress's practice period, and sometimes purring an accompaniment to tunes she especially liked—such tunes as "The Maiden's Prayer" or "Old Black Joe with Variations." There was, too, about her a touch of something which Missy thought must be mysticism; for Poppy heard sounds and saw things which no one else could—following these invisible objects with attentive eyes while Missy saw nothing; then, sometimes, she would get up suddenly, switching her tail, and watch them as they evidently disappeared. But Missy never mentioned Poppy's gift of second sight; she knew the old people would only laugh.

Now she cuddled Poppy in her lap, and with a sense of companionship, enjoyed the landscape of silvered loveliness and peace. A sort of sad enjoyment, but pleasantly sad. Occasionally she sighed, but it was a sigh of deep content. Such things as perching dizzily atop a horse's back, even cantering in graceful insouciance, seemed far, far away.

Yet, after she was in her little white bed, in smiling dreams she saw herself, smartly accoutred in gleaming boots and pepper-and-salt riding-breeches, galloping up to Pieker's grocery and there, in the

admiring view of the Post Office loafers and of a dumbfounded Arthur, cantering insouciantly across the sidewalk and into the store!

Her dream might have ended there, nothing more than a fleeting phantasm, had not Tess, the following week, come into possession of Gypsy.

Gypsy was a black pony with a white star on her forehead and a long wavy tail. She was a pony with a personality—from the start Missy recognized the pony as a person just as she recognized Poppy as a person. When Gypsy gazed at you out of those soft, bright eyes, or when she pricked up her ears with an alert listening gesture, or when she turned her head and switched her tail with nonchalant unconcern—oh, it is impossible to describe the charm of Gypsy. That was it—"charm"; and the minute Missy laid eyes on the darling she succumbed to it. She had thought herself absurdly but deep-rootedly afraid of all horseflesh, but Gypsy didn't seem a mere horse. She was pert, coquettish, coy, loving, inquisitive, naughty; both Tess and Missy declared she had really human intelligence.

She began to manifest this the very day of her arrival. After Tess had ridden round the town and shown off properly, she left the pony in the side-yard of the sanitarium while she and Missy slipped off to the summerhouse to enjoy a few stolen chapters from "The Duchess." There was high need for secrecy for, most unreasonably, "The Duchess" had been put under a parental ban; moreover Tess feared there were stockings waiting to be darned.

Presently they heard Mrs. O'Neill calling, but they just sat still, stifling their giggles. Gypsy, who had sauntered up to the summerhouse door, poked in an inquisitive nose. Mrs. O'Neill didn't call again, so Tess whispered: "She thinks we've gone over to your house—we can go on reading."

After a while Missy glanced up and nudged Tess. "Gypsy's still there—just standing and looking at us! See her bright eyes—the darling!"

"Yes, isn't she cute?" agreed Tess.

But, just at that, a second shadow fell athwart the sunny sward, a hand pushed Gypsy's head from the opening, and Mrs. O'Neill's voice said:

"If you girls don't want your whereabouts given away, you'd better teach that pony not to stand with her head poked in the door for a half-hour without budging!"

The ensuing scolding wasn't pleasant, but neither of the miscreants had the heart to blame Gypsy. She was so cute.

She certainly was cute.

The second day of her ownership Tess judged it necessary to give Gypsy a switching; Gypsy declined to be saddled and went circling round and round the yard in an abandon of playfulness. So Tess snapped off a peach-tree switch and, finally cornering the pony, proceeded to use it. Missy pleaded, but Tess stood firm for discipline. However Gypsy revenged herself; for two hours she wouldn't let Tess come near her—she'd sidle up and lay her velvet nose against Missy's shoulder until

Tess was within an arm's length, and then, tossing her head spitefully, caper away.

No wonder the girls ejaculated at her smartness.

Finally she turned gentle as a lamb, soft as silk, and let Tess adjust the saddle; but scarcely had Tess ridden a block before—wrench!—something happened to the saddle, and Tess was left seated by the roadside while Gypsy vanished in a cloud of dust. The imp had deliberately swelled herself out so that the girth would be loose!

Every day brought new revelations of Gypsy's intelligence. Missy took to spending every spare minute at Tess's. Under this new captivation her own pet, Poppy, was thoughtlessly neglected. And duties such as practicing, dusting and darning were deliberately shirked. Even reading had lost much of its wonted charm: the haunting, soul-swelling rhythms of poetry, or the oddly phrased medieval romances which somehow carried you back through the centuries—into the very presence of those queenly heroines who trail their robes down the golden stairways of legend. But Missy's feet seemed to have forgotten the familiar route to the Public Library and, instead, ever turned eagerly toward the O'Neills'—that is, toward the O'Neills' barn.

And, if she had admired Tess before, she worshipped her now for so generously permitting another to share the wonderful pony—it was like being a half owner. And the odd thing was that, though Gypsy had undeniable streaks of wildness, Missy never felt a tremor while on her. On Gypsy she cantered, she

trotted, she galloped, just as naturally and enjoyably as though she had been born on horseback. Then one epochal day, emulating Tess's example, she essayed to ride astride. It was wonderful. She could imagine herself a Centaur princess. And, curiously, she felt not at all embarrassed. Yet she was glad that, back there in the lot, she was screened by the big barn from probably critical eyes.

But Gypsy made an unexpected dart into the barn-door, through the barn, and out into the yard, before Missy realized the capricious creature's intent. And, as luck would have it, the Reverend MacGill was sitting on the porch, calling on Grandma Shears. If only it had been anybody but Rev. MacGill! Missy cherished a secret but profound admiration for Rev. MacGill; he had come recently to Cherryvale and was younger than ministers usually are and, though not exactly handsome, had fascinating dark glowing eyes. Now, as his eyes turned toward her, she suddenly prickled with embarrassment—her legs were showing to her knees! She tried vainly to pull down her skirt, then tried to head Gypsy toward the barn. But Grandma Shears, in scandalized tones, called out:

"Why, Melissa Merriam! Get down off that horse immediately!"

Shamefacedly Missy obeyed, but none too gracefully since her legs were not yet accustomed to that straddling position.

"What in the world will you girls be up to next?" Grandma Shears went on, looking like an outraged

Queen Victoria. "I don't know what this generation's coming to," she lamented, turning to the minister. "Young girls try to act like hoodlums—deliberately *try!* In my day girls were trained to be—and desired to be—little ladies."

Little ladies!—in the minister's presence, the phrase didn't fall pleasantly on Missy's ear.

"Oh, they don't mean any harm," he replied. "Just a little innocent frolic."

There was a ghost of a twinkle in his eyes. Missy didn't know whether to be grateful for his tolerance or only more chagrined because he was laughing at her. She stood, feeling red as a beet, while Grandma Shears retorted:

"Innocent frolic—nonsense! I'll speak to my daughter!" Then, to Missy: "Now take that pony back to the lot, please, and let's see no more such disgraceful exhibitions!"

Missy felt as though she'd been whipped. She felt cold all over and shivered, as she led Gypsy back, though she knew she was blushing furiously. Concealed behind the barn door, peeping through a crack, was Tess.

"It was awful!" moaned Missy. "I can never face Rev. MacGill again!"

"Oh, he's a good sport," said Tess.

"She gave me an awful calling down."

"Oh, grandma's an old fogy." Missy had heard Tess thus pigeonhole her grandmother often before, but now, for the first time, she didn't feel a little secret repugnance for the rude classification. Grand-

ma Shears *was* old-fogyish. But it wasn't her old-fogyishness, *per se*, that irritated; it was the fact that her old-fogyishness had made her "call down" Missy—in front of the minister. Just as if Missy were a child. Fifteen is not a child, to itself. And it can rankle and burn, when a pair of admired dark eyes are included in the situation, just as torturesomely as can twice fifteen.

The Reverend MacGill was destined to play another unwitting part in Missy's athletic drama which was so jumbled with ecstasies and discomfitures. A few days later he was invited to the Merriams' for supper. Missy heard of his coming with mingled emotions. Of course she thrilled at the prospect of eating at the same table with him—listening to a person at table, and watching him eat, gives you a singular sense of intimacy. But there was that riding astride episode. Would he, maybe, mention it and cause mother to ask questions? Maybe not, for he was, as Tess had said, a "good sport." But all the same he'd probably be thinking of it; if he should look at her again with that amused twinkle, she felt she would die of shame.

That afternoon she had been out on Gypsy and, chancing to ride by home on her way back to the sanitarium barn, was hailed by her mother.

"Missy! I want you to gather some peaches!"

"Well, I'll have to take Gypsy home first."

"No, you won't have time—it's after five already, and I want to make a deep-dish peach pie. I hear Rev. MacGill's especially fond of it. You can take

Gypsy home after supper. Now hurry up!—I'm behindhand already."

So Missy led Gypsy into the yard and took the pail her mother brought out to her.

"The peaches aren't quite ripe," said mother, with a little worried pucker, "but they'll have to do. They have some lovely peaches at Pieker's, but papa won't hear of my trading at Pieker's any more."

Missy thought it silly of her father to have curtailed trading at Pieker's—she missed Arthur's daily visit to the kitchen door with the delivery-basket—merely because Mr. Pieker had beaten father for election on the Board of Aldermen. Father explained it was a larger issue than party politics; even had Pieker been a Republican he'd have fought him, he said, for everyone knew Pieker was abetting the Waterworks graft. But Missy didn't see why that should keep him from buying things from Pieker's which mother really needed; mother said it was "cutting off your nose to spite your face."

Philosophizing on the irrationality of old people, she proceeded to get enough scarcely-ripe peaches for a deep-dish pie. Being horribly afraid of climbing, she used the simple expedient of grasping the lower limbs of the tree and shaking down the fruit.

"Missy!" called mother's voice from the dining room window. "That horse is slobbering all over the peaches!"

"I can't help it—she follows me every place."

"Then you'll have to tie her up!"

"Tess never ties her up in *their* yard!"

"Well, I won't have him slobbering over the fruit," repeated mother firmly.

"I'll—climb the tree," said Missy desperately.

And she did. She was in mortal terror—every second she was sure she was going to fall—but she couldn't bear the vision of Gypsy's reproachful eyes above a strangling halter; Gypsy shouldn't think her hostess, so to speak, less kind than her own mistress.

The peach pie came out beautifully and the supper promised to be a great success. Mother had zealously ascertained Rev. MacGill's favourite dishes, and was flushed but triumphant; she came of a devout family that loved to feed preachers well. And everyone was in fine spirits; only Missy, at the first, had a few bad moments. *Would* he mention it? He might think it his duty, think that mother should know. It was maybe his duty to tell. Preachers have a sterner creed of duty than other people, of course. She regarded him anxiously from under the veil of her lashes, wondering what would happen if he did tell. Mother would be horribly ashamed, and she herself would be all the more ashamed because mother was. Aunt Nettie would be satirically disapproving and say cutting things. Father would probably just laugh, but later he'd be serious and severe. And not one of them would ever, ever understand.

As the minutes went by, her strain of suspense gradually lessened. Rev. MacGill was chatting away easily—about the delicious chicken-stuffing and quince jelly, and the election, and the repairs on the

church steeple, and things like that. Now and then he caught Missy's eye, but his expression for her was exactly the same as for the others—no one could suspect there was any secret between them. He *was* a good sport!

Once a shadow passed outside the window. Gypsy! Missy saw that he saw, and, as his glance came back to rest upon herself, for a second her heart surged. But something in his eyes—she couldn't define exactly what it was save that it was neither censorious nor quizzical—subtly gave her reassurance. It was as if he had told her in so many words that everything was all right, for her not to worry the least little bit. All of a sudden she felt blissfully at peace. She smiled at him for no reason at all, and he smiled back—a nice, not at all amused kind of smile. Oh, he was a perfect brick! And what glorious eyes he had! And that fascinating habit of flinging his hair back with a quick toss of the head. How gracefully he used his hands. And what lovely, distinguished table manners—she must practice that trick of lifting your napkin, delicately and swiftly, so as to barely touch your lips. She ate her own food in a kind of trance, unaware of what she was eating; yet it was like eating supper in heaven.

And then, at the very end, something terrible happened. Marguerite had brought in the *pièce de résistance*, the climactic dish toward which mother had built the whole meal—the deep-dish peach pie, sugar-coated, fragrant and savory—and placed it on the serving-table near the open window. There was a

bit of wire loose at the lower end of the screen, and, in the one second Marguerite's back was turned—just one second, but just long enough—Missy saw a velvety nose fumble with the loose wire, saw a sleek neck wedge itself through the crevice, and a long red tongue lap approvingly over the sugar-coated crust.

Missy gasped audibly. Mother followed her eyes, turned, saw, jumped up—but it was too late. Mrs. Merriam viciously struck at Gypsy's muzzle and pushed the encroaching head back through the aperture.

"Get away from here!" she cried angrily. "You little beast!"

"I think the pony shows remarkably good taste," commented Rev. MacGill, trying to pass the calamity off as a joke. But his hostess wasn't capable of an answering smile; she gazed despairingly, tragically, at the desecrated confection.

"I took such pains with it," she almost wailed. "It was a deep-dish peach pie—I made it specially for Mr. MacGill."

"Well, I'm not particularly fond of peach pie, anyway," said the minister, meaning to be soothing.

"Oh, but I know you *are!* Mrs. Allen said that at her house you took two helpings—that you said it was your favourite dessert."

The minister coughed a little cough—he was caught in a somewhat delicate situation; then, always tactful, replied: "Perhaps I did say that—her peach pie was very good. But I'm equally fond of all sweets—I have a sweet tooth."

At this point Missy gathered her courage to quaver a suggestion. "Couldn't you just take off the top crust, mother? Gypsy didn't touch the underneath part. Why can't you just—"

But her mother's scandalized look silenced her. She must have made a *faux pas*. Father and Rev. MacGill laughed outright, and Aunt Nettie smiled a withering smile.

"That's a brilliant idea," she said satirically. "Perhaps you'd have us pick out the untouched bits of the crust, too!" Missy regarded her aunt reproachfully but helplessly; she was too genuinely upset for any repartee. Why did Aunt Nettie like to put her "in wrong"? Her suggestion seemed to her perfectly reasonable. Why didn't they act on it? But of course they'd ignore it, just making fun of her now but punishing her afterward. For she divined very accurately that they would hold her accountable for Gypsy's blunder—even though the blunder was rectifiable; it was a *big* pie, and most of it as good as ever. They were unreasonable, unjust.

Mother seemed unable to tear herself away from the despoiled masterpiece.

"Come, mamma," said father, "it's nothing to make such a fuss about. Just trot out some of that apple sauce of yours. Mr. MacGill doesn't get to taste anything like that every day." He turned to the minister. "The world's full of apple sauce—but there's apple sauce and apple sauce. Now my wife's apple sauce is *apple sauce!* I tell her it's a dish for a king."

And Rev. MacGill, after sampling the impromptu dessert, assured his hostess that her husband's eulogy had been only too moderate. He vowed he had never eaten such apple sauce. But Mrs. Merriam still looked bleak. She knew she could make a better deep-dish peach pie than Mrs. Allen could. And, then, to give the minister apple sauce and nabiscos! —the first time he had eaten at her table in two months!

Missy, who knew her mother well, couldn't help feeling a deep degree of sympathy; besides, she wished Rev. MacGill might have had his pie—she liked Rev. MacGill better than ever. But she dreaded her first moments after the guest had departed; mother could be terribly stern.

Nor did her fears prove groundless.

"Now, Missy," ordered her mother in coldly irate tones, "you take that horse straight back to Tess. This is the last straw! For days you've been no earthly use—your practicing neglected, no time for your chores, just nothing but that everlasting horse!"

That everlasting horse! Missy's chin quivered and her eyes filled. But mother went on inflexibly: "I don't want you ever to bring it here again. And you can't go on living at Tess's, either! We'll see that you catch up with your practicing."

"But, mother," tremulously seeking for an argument, "I oughtn't to give up such a fine chance to become a horsewoman, ought I?"

It was an unlucky phrase, for Aunt Nettie was there to catch it up.

"A horsewoman!" and she laughed in sardonic glee. "Well, I must admit there's one thing horsey enough about *you*—you always smell of manure, these days."

Wounded and on the defensive, Missy tried to make her tone chilly. "I wish you wouldn't be so indelicate, Aunt Nettie," she said.

But Aunt Nettie wasn't abashed. "A horsewoman!" she chortled again. "I suppose Missy sees herself riding to hounds! All dressed up in a silk hat and riding-breeches like pictures of society people back East!"

It didn't add to Missy's comfiture to know she had, in truth, harboured this ridiculed vision of herself. She coloured and stood hesitant.

"Someone ought to put pants on that O'Neill girl, anyway," continued Aunt Nettie with what seemed to her niece unparallelled malice. "Helen Alison says the Doctor saw her out in the country riding astraddle. Her mother ought to spank her."

Mother looked at Missy sharply. "Don't let me ever hear of *you* doing anything like that!"

Missy hung her head, but luckily mother took it for just a general attitude of dejection. "I can't tolerate tomboys," she went on. "I can't imagine what's come over you lately."

"It's that O'Neill girl," said Aunt Nettie.

Mother sighed; Missy couldn't know she was lamenting the loss of her sweet, shy, old-fashioned little girl. But when she spoke next her accents were firm.

"Now you go and take that horse home. But come straight back and get to bed so you can get an early start at your practicing in the morning. Right here I'm going to put my foot down. It isn't because I want to be harsh—but you never seem to know when to stop a thing. It's all well and good to be fond of dumb animals, but when it comes to a point where you can think of nothing else—"

The outstanding import of the terrific and unjust tirade was that Missy should not go near the sanitarium or the pony for a week.

When mother "put her foot down" like that, hope was gone, indeed. And a whole week! That was a long, long time when hope is deferred—especially when one is fifteen and all days are long. At first Missy didn't see how she was ever to live through the endless period, but, strangely enough, the dragging days brought to her a change of mood. It is odd how the colour of our mood, so to speak, can utterly change; how one day we can desire one kind of thing acutely and then, the very next day, crave something quite different.

One morning Missy awoke to a dawn of mildest sifted light and bediamonded dew upon the grass; soft plumes of silver, through the mist, seemed to trim the vines of the summerhouse and made her catch her breath in ecstasy. All of a sudden she wanted nothing so much as to get a book and steal off alone somewhere. The right kind of a book, of course—something sort of strange and sad that would make your strange, sad feelings mount up

and up inside you till you could almost die of your beautiful sorrow.

As soon as her routine of duties was finished she gained permission to go to the Library. As she walked slowly, musingly, down Maple Avenue, her emotions were fallow ground for every touch of Nature: the slick greensward of all the lawns, glistening under the torrid azure of the great arched sky, made walking along the shady sidewalk inexpressibly sweet; the many-hued flowers in all the flowerbeds seemed to sing out their vying colours; the strong hard wind passed almost visible fingers through the thick, rustling mane of the trees. Oh, she hoped she would find the right kind of book!

Mother, back on the porch, looked up from her sewing to watch the disappearing figure, and smiled.

"We have our little girl back again," she observed to Aunt Nettie.

"I wish that O'Neill girl'd move away," Aunt Nettie said. "Missy's a regular chameleon."

It's a pity Missy couldn't hear her new classification; it would have interested her tremendously; she was always interested in the perplexing vagaries of her own nature. However, at the Library, she was quite happy; for she found two books, each the right kind, though different. One was called "Famous Heroines of Medieval Legend." They all had names of strange beauty and splendour—Guinevere—Elaine—Vivien—names which softly rustled in syllables of silken brocade. The other book was no less satisfying. It was a book of poems—wonderful poems, by

a man named Swinburne—lilting, haunting things of beauty which washed through her soul like the waves of a sun-bejewelled sea. She read the choicest verses over and over till she knew them by heart:

Before the beginning of years, there came to the making of man
Grief with her gift of tears, and Time with her glass that ran . . .

and, equally lovely:

From too much love of living, from hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be
That no life lives forever; that dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea . . .

The verses brought her beautiful, stirring thoughts to weave into verses of her own when she should find a quiet hour in the summerhouse; or to incorporate into soul-soothing improvisings at the piano.

Next morning, after her hour's stint at finger exercises, she improvised and it went beautifully. She knew it was a success both because of her exalted feelings and because Poppy meowed out in discordant disapproval only once; the rest of the time Poppy purred as appreciatively as for "The Maiden's Prayer." Dear Poppy! Missy felt suddenly contrite for her defection from faithful Poppy. And Poppy was getting old—Aunt Nettie said she'd already lived much longer than most cats. She might die soon. Through a swift blur of tears Missy looked out toward the summerhouse where, beneath the ramblers, she decided Poppy should be buried. Poor Poppy! The tears came so fast she couldn't wipe them away. She didn't dream that Swinburne was primarily responsible for those tears.

Yet even her sadness held a strange, poignant element of bliss. It struck her, oddly, that she was almost enjoying her week of punishment—that she *was* enjoying it. Why was she enjoying it, since, when mother first banned athletic pursuits, she had felt like a martyr? It was queer. She pondered the mysterious complexity of her nature.

There passed two more days of this inexplicable content. Then came the thunder-storm. It was, perhaps, the thunder-storm that really deserves the blame for Missy's climactic athletic catastrophe. No lightning-bolt struck, yet that thunder-storm indubitably played its part in Missy's athletic destiny. It was the causation of renewed turmoil after time of peace.

Tess had telephoned that morning and asked Missy to accompany her to the Library. But Missy had to practice. In her heart she didn't really care to go, for, after her stint was finished, she was contemplating some new improvisings. However, the morning didn't go well. It was close and sultry and, though she tried to make her fingers march and trot and gallop as the exercises dictated, something in the oppressive air set her nerves to tingling. Besides it grew so dark she couldn't see the notes distinctly. Finally she abandoned her lesson; but even improvising failed of its wonted charm. Her fingers kept striking the wrong keys. Then a sudden, ear-splitting thunder-clap hurled her onto a shrieking discord.

She jumped up from the piano; she was horribly

afraid of thunder-storms—mother wouldn't mind if she stopped till the storm was over. She longed to go and sit close to mother, to feel the protection of her presence; but, despite the general softening of her mood, she had maintained a certain stiffness toward the family. So she crouched on a sofa in the darkest corner of the room, hiding her eyes, stopping her ears.

Then a sudden thought brought her bolt upright. Gypsy! Tess had said Gypsy was afraid of thunder-storms—awfully afraid. And Gypsy was all alone in that big, gloomy barn—Tess blocks away at the Library.

She tried to hide amongst the cushions again, but visions of Gypsy, with her bright inquisitive eyes, her funny little petulances, her endearing cajoleries, kept rising before her. She felt a stab of remorse; that she could have let even the delights of reading and improvising compensate for separation from such a darling pony. She had been selfish, self-centred. And now Gypsy was alone in that old barn, trembling and neighing. . . .

Finally, unable to endure the picture longer, she crept out to the hall. She could hear mother and Aunt Nettie in the sitting-room—she couldn't get an umbrella from the closet. So, without umbrella or hat, she stole out the front door. Above was a continuous network of flame as though someone were scratching immense matches all over the surface of heaven, but doggedly she ran on. The downpour caught her, but on she sped though rain and hail

hammered her head, blinded her eyes, and drove her drenched garments against her flesh.

She found Gypsy huddled quivering and taut in a corner of the stall. She put her arms round the satiny neck, and they mutely comforted each other. It was thus that Tess discovered them; she, too, had run to Gypsy though it had taken longer as she had farther to go; but she was not so wet as Missy, having borrowed an umbrella at the Library.

"*I* didn't wait to get an umbrella," Missy couldn't forebear commenting, slightly slurring the truth.

Tess seemed a bit annoyed. "Well, you didn't *have* to go out in the rain anyway. Guess I can be depended on to look out for my own pony, can't I?"

But Missy's tactful rejoinder that she'd only feared Tess mightn't be able to accomplish the longer distance, served to dissipate the shadow of jealousy. Before the summer storm had impetuously spent itself, the friends were crowded companionably in the feed-box, feeding the reassured Gypsy peppermint sticks—Tess had met Arthur Simpson on her way to the Library—and talking earnestly.

The earnest talk was born of an illustration Tess had seen in a magazine at the Library. It was a society story and the illustration showed the heroine in riding costume.

"She looked awfully swagger," related Tess. "Flicking her crop against her boot, and a derby hat and stock-collar and riding-breeches. I think breeches are a lot more swagger than habits."

"Do you think they're a little bit—indelicate?" ventured Missy, remembering her mother's recent invective against tomboys.

"Of course not!" denied Tess disdainfully. "Valerie Jones in Macon City wears 'em and she's awfully swell. Her father's a banker. She's in the thick of things at the Country Club. It's *depasse* to ride side-saddle, anyway."

Missy was silent; even when she felt herself misunderstood by her family and maltreated, she had a bothersome conscience.

"There's no real class to riding horseback," Tess went on, "unless you're up to date. You got to be up to date. Of course Cherryvale's slow, but that's no reason *we've* got to be slow, is it?"

"No-o," agreed Missy hesitantly. But she was emboldened to mention her father's discarded pepper-and-salt trousers. At the first she didn't intend really to appropriate them, but Tess caught up the idea enthusiastically. She immediately began making concrete plans and, soon, Missy caught her fervour. That picture of herself as a dashing, fearless horsewoman had come to life again.

When she got home, mother, looking worried, was waiting for her.

"Where on earth have you been? Look at that straggly hair! And that dress, fresh just this morning—limp as a dish-rag!"

Missy tried to explain, but the anxiety between mother's eyes deepened to lines of crossness.

"For heaven's sake! To go rushing off like that

without a rain-coat or even an umbrella! And you pretend to be afraid of thunder-storms! Now, Missy, it isn't because you've ruined your dress or likely caught your death of cold—but to think you'd wilfully disobey me! What on earth *am* I to do with you?"

She made Missy feel like an unregenerate sinner. And Missy liked her stinging, smarting sensations no better because she felt she didn't deserve them. That heavy sense of injustice somewhat deadened any pricks of guilt when, later, she stealthily removed the pepper-and-salts from the upstairs store-closet.

But Aunt Nettie's eagle eyes chanced to see her. She went to Mrs. Merriam.

"What do you suppose Missy wants of those old pepper-and-salt pants?"

"I don't know, Nettie. Why?"

"She's just sneaked 'em off to her room. When she saw me coming up the stairs, she scampered as if Satan was after her. What *do* you suppose she wants of them?"

"I can't imagine," repeated Mrs. Merriam. "Maybe she hardly knows herself—girls that age are like a boiling tea-kettle, you know; their imagination keeps bubbling up and spilling over, and then disappears into vapour. I sometimes think we bother Missy too much with questions—she doesn't know the answers herself."

Mrs. Merriam was probably feeling the compunctions mothers often feel after they have scolded.

Aunt Nettie sniffed a little, but Missy wasn't questioned. And now the scene of our story may shift to a sunny morning, a few days later, and to the comparative seclusion of the sanitarium barn. There has been, for an hour or more, a suppressed sound of giggles, and Gypsy, sensing excitement in the air, stands with pricked-up ears and bright, inquisitive eyes. Luckily there has been no intruder—just the three of them, Gypsy and Missy and Tess.

"You're wonderful—simply wonderful! It's simply too swagger for words!" It was Tess speaking.

Missy gazed down at herself. It *was* swagger, she assured herself. It must be swagger—Tess said so. Almost as swagger, Tess asseverated, as the riding outfit worn by Miss Valerie Jones who was the swaggerest member of Macon City's swaggerest young set. Yet, despite her assurance of swaggerness, she was conscious of a certain uneasiness. She knew she shouldn't feel embarrassed; she should feel only swagger. But she couldn't help a sense of awkwardness, almost of distaste; her legs felt—and *looked*—so queer! So conspicuous! The upper halves of them were clothed in two separate envelopments of pepper-and-salt material, gathered very full and puffy over the hips but drawn in tightly toward the knee in a particularly swagger fashion. Below the knee the swagger tight effect was sustained by a pair of long buttoned "leggings."

"You're sure these leggings look all right?" she demanded anxiously.

"Of course they look all right! They look fine!"

"I wish we had some boots," with a smothered sigh.

"Well, they don't *always* wear boots. Lots of 'em in Macon City only wore puttees. And puttees are only a kind of leggings."

"They're so tight," complained the horsewoman. "My legs have got a lot fatter since—"

Thrusting out one of the mentioned members in a tentative kick, she was interrupted by the popping of an already overstrained button.

"*See!*" she finished despondently. "I *said* they were too tight."

"You oughtn't to kick around that way," reproved Tess. "No wonder it popped off. Now, I'll have to hunt for a safety-pin—"

"I don't want a safety-pin!—I'd rather let it flop."

The horsewoman continued to survey herself dubiously, took in the bright scarlet sweater which formed the top part of her costume. The girls had first sought a more tailored variety of coat, but *pères* Merriam and O'Neill were both, selfishly, very large men; Tess had brilliantly bethought the sweater —the English always wore scarlet for hunting, anyway. Missy then had warmly applauded the inspiration, but now her warmth was literal rather than figurative; it was a hot day and the sweater was knitted of heavy wool. She fingered her stock collar —one of Mrs. O'Neill's guest towels—and tried to adjust her derby more securely.

"Your father has an awfully big head," she commented.

"Oh, they always wear their hats way down over their ears." Then, a little vexed at this necessity for repeated reassurance, Tess broke out irritably:

"If you don't want to wear the get-up, say so! *I'll* wear it! I only let you wear it first trying to be nice to you!"

Then Missy, who had been genuinely moved by Tess's decision that the first wearing of the costume should make up for her chum's week of punishment, pulled herself together.

"Of course I want to wear it," she declared. "I think it's just fine of you to let me wear it first."

She spoke sincerely; yet, within the hour, she was plotting to return her friend's sacrifice with a sort of mean trick. Perhaps it was fit and just that the trick turned topsy-turvy on herself as it did. Yet the notion did not come to her in the guise of a trick on Tess. No; it came just as a daring, dashing, splendid feat in which she herself should triumphantly figure—she scarcely thought of Tess at all.

It came upon her, in all its dazzling possibilities, while she was cantering along the old road which runs back of Smith's woods. She and Tess had agreed it would be best, till they'd "broke in" Cherryvale to the novelty of breeches, to keep to unfrequented roads. But it was the inconspicuousness of the route, the lack of an admiring audience, which gave birth to Missy's startling Idea. Back in the barn she'd felt self-conscious. But now she was getting used to her exposed legs. And doing really splendidly on Dr. O'Neill's saddle. Sitting there

astride, swaying in gentle rhythm with Gypsy's springing motion she began to feel truly dashing, supremely swagger. She seemed lifted out of herself, no longer timid, commonplace, unathletic Missy Merriam, but exalted into a sort of free-and-easy Princess Royal of Swaggerdom. She began to wish someone might see her. . . .

Then startling, compelling, tantalizing, came the Idea. Why not ride openly back into Cherryvale, right up Main Street, right by the Post Office? All those old loafers would see her who'd laughed the day she tumbled off of Ned. Well, they'd laugh the other way, now. And Arthur Simpson, too. Maybe she'd even ride into Pieker's store!—that certainly would surprise Arthur. True it was Tess he'd "dared," but of course he had not dreamed *she*, Missy, would ever take it up. He considered her unathletic—sort of ridiculous. Wouldn't it be great to "show" him? She visioned the amazement, the admiration, the respect, which would shine in his eyes as, insouciantly and yet with dash, she deftly manœuvred Gypsy's reins and cantered right into the store!

Afterwards she admitted that a sort of madness must have seized her; yet, as she raced back toward the town, gently swaying in unison with her mount, her pepper-and-salt legs pressing the pony's sides with authority, she felt complacently, exultantly sane.

And still so when, blithe and debonair, she galloped up Main Street, past piazzas she pleasurably

sensed were not unpeopled nor unimpressed; past the Court House whence a group of men were emerging and stopped dead to stare; past the Post Office where a crowd awaiting the noon mail swelled the usual bunch of loafers; on to Pieker's where, sure enough, Arthur stood in the door!

"Holy cats!" he ejaculated. "Where in the world did—"

"Dare me to ride in the store?" demanded Missy, flicking the air with her crop and speaking insouciantly. She was scarcely aware of the excited sounds from the Post Office, for as yet her madness was upon her.

"Oh, I don't think you could get her in!—You'd better not try!"

Missy exulted—he looked as if actually afraid she might attempt it! As a matter of fact Arthur was afraid; he was afraid Missy Merriam had suddenly gone out of her head. There was a queer look in her eyes—she didn't look herself at all. He was afraid she might really do that crazy stunt; and he was afraid the boss might return from lunch any second, and catch her doing it and blame *him!* Yes, Arthur Simpson was afraid; and Missy's blood sang at the spectacle of happy-go-lucky Arthur reduced to manifest anxiety.

"*Can't* get her in?" she retorted derisively. "Just watch me!"

And, patting Gypsy's glossy neck, she headed her mount directly toward the sidewalk and clattered straight into Pieker's store.

Arthur had barely time to jump out of the way. "Holy cats!" he again invoked fervently. Then: "Head her out!—She's slobbering over that bucket of candy!"

True enough; Gypsy's inquisitive nose had led her to a bewildering profusion of the sweets she adored; not just meagre little bits, doled out to her stingily bite by bite. And, as if these delectables had been set out for a special and royal feast, Gypsy tasted this corner and sampled that, in gourmandish abandon.

"For Pete's sake!" implored Arthur, feverishly tugging at the bridle. "Get her out! The old man's liable to get back any minute!—He won't do a thing to me!"

Missy, then, catching some of his perturbation, slapped with the reins, stroked Gypsy's neck, exhorted her with endearments and then with threats. But Gypsy wouldn't budge; she was having, unexpectedly but ecstatically, the time of her career. Missy climbed down; urged and cajoled, joined Arthur in tugging at the bridle. Gypsy only planted her dainty forefeet and continued her repast in a manner not dainty at all. Missy began to feel a little desperate; that former fine frenzy, that divine madness, that magnificent tingle of aplomb and dash, was dwindling away. She was conscious of a crowd collecting in the doorway; there suddenly seemed to be millions of people in the store—rude, pushing, chortling phantoms as in some dreadful nightmare. Hot, prickling waves began to wash over her. They

were *laughing* at her. Spurred by the vulgar guffaws she gave another frantic tug—

Oh, dear heaven! The upper air suddenly thickened with sounds of buzzing conflict—a family of mud-wasps, roused by the excitement, were circling round and round! She saw them in terrified fascination—they were scattering!—zizzing horribly, threateningly as they swooped this way and that! Heavens!—that one brushed her hand. She tried to shrink back—then gave an anguished squeal.

What was that? But she knew what it was. In petrified panic she stood stock-still, rooted. She was afraid to move lest it sting her more viciously. She could feel it exploring around—up near her hip now, now crawling downward, now for a second lost in some voluminous fold. She found time to return thanks that her breeches had been cut with that smart bouffance. Then she cringed as she felt it again. How had It got in there? The realization that she must have torn her pepper-and-salts, for a breath brought embarrassment acutely to the fore; then, as that tickling promenade over her anatomy was resumed, she froze under paramount fear.

"For Pete's sake!" shouted Arthur. "Don't just stand there!—can't you do *something?*"

But Missy could do nothing. Removing Gypsy was no longer the paramount issue. Ready to die of shame but at the same time engripped by deadly terror, she stood, legs wide apart, for her life's sake unable to move. She had lost count of time, but was agonizedly aware of its passage; she seemed to

stand there in that anguished stupor for centuries. In reality it was but a second before she heard Arthur's voice again:

"For Heaven's sake!" he muttered, calamity's approach intensifying his abjurgations. "There's the old man!"

Apprehensively, abasedly, but with legs still stolidly apart, Missy looked up. Yes, there was Mr. Pieker, elbowing his way through the crowd. Then an icy trickle chilled her spine; following Mr. Pieker, carrying his noon mail, was Rev. MacGill.

"Here!—What's this?" demanded Mr. Pieker.

Then she heard Arthur, that craven-hearted, traitor-souled being she had once called "friend," that she had even desired to impress,—she heard him saying:

"I don't know, Mr. Pieker. She just came riding in—"

Mr. Pieker strode to the centre of the stage and, by a simple expedient strangely unthought-of before —by merely pulling away the bucket, separated Gypsy from the candy.

Then he turned to Missy and eyed her disapprovingly.

"I think you'd better be taking the back cut home. If I was your mamma, I'd give you a good spanking and put you to bed."

Spanking! Oh, shades of insouciance and swagger! And with Rev. MacGill standing there hearing—and seeing! Tears rolled down over her blushes.

"Here, I'll help you get her out," said Rev. Mac-

Gill, kindly. Missy blessed him for his kindness, yet, just then, she felt she'd rather have been stung to death than to have had him there. But he was there, and he led Gypsy, quite tractable now the candy was gone, and herself looking actually embarrassed, through the crowd and back to the street.

High moments have a way, sometimes, of resolving their prime and unreducible factors, all of a sudden, to disconcertingly simple terms. Here was Gypsy, whose stubbornness had begun it all, suddenly soft as silk; and there was the wasp, who had brought on the horrendous climax, suddenly and mysteriously vanished. Of course Missy was glad the wasp was gone—otherwise she might have stood there, dying of shame, till she did die of shame—yet the sudden solution of her dilemma made her feel in another way absurd.

But there was little room for such a paltry emotion as absurdity. Rev. MacGill volunteered to deliver Gypsy to her stall—oh, he was wonderful, though she almost wished he'd have to leave town unexpectedly; she didn't see how she'd ever face him again—but she knew there was a reckoning waiting at home.

It was a painful and unforgettable scene. Mother had heard already; father had telephoned from the office. Missy supposed all Cherryvale was telephoning but she deferred thoughts of her wider disgrace; at present mother was enough. Mother was fearfully angry—Missy knew she would never understand. She said harsher things than she'd ever said

before. Making such a spectacle of herself!—her own daughter, whom she'd tried to train to be a lady! This feature of the situation seemed to stir mother almost more violently than the flagrant disobedience.

"It's all that O'Neill girl," said Aunt Nettie. "Ever since she came here to live, Missy's been up to just one craziness after another."

Mother looked out the window and sighed. Missy was suddenly conscious that she loved her mother very much; despite the fact that mother had just said harsh things, that she was going to punish her, that she never understood. A longing welled up in her to fling her arms round mother's neck and assure her that she never *meant* to be a spectacle, that she had only—

But what was the use of trying to explain? Mother wouldn't understand and she couldn't explain it in words, anyway—not even to herself. So she stood first on one foot and then on the other, and felt perfectly inadequate and miserable.

At last, wanting frightfully to say something that would ameliorate her conduct somewhat in mother's eyes, she said:

"I guess it *was* an awful thing to do, mother. And I'm *awfully* sorry. But it wouldn't have come out quite so bad—I could have managed Gypsy better, I think—if it hadn't been for that old wasp."

"Wasp?" questioned mother.

"Yes, there was a lot of mud-wasps got to flying around and one some way got inside of my—my

breeches. And you know how scared to death I am of wasps. I *know* I could have managed Gypsy, but when I felt that wasp crawling around—" She broke off; tried again. "Don't think I couldn't manage her—but when I felt that—"

"Well, if the wasp was all that was the matter," queried mother, "why didn't you go after it?"

Missy didn't reply.

"Why did you just stand there and let it keep stinging you?"

Missy opened her lips but quickly closed them again. She realized there was something inconsistent in her explanation. Mother had accused her of immodesty: riding astride and wearing those scandalous pepper-and-salts and showing her legs. If mother was right, if she *was* brazen, somehow it didn't tie up to claim confusion because her—

Oh, legs!

She didn't try to explain. With hanging head she went meekly to her room. Mother had ruled she must stay there, in disgrace, till father came home and a proper punishment was decided upon.

It was not a short or glad afternoon.

At supper father came up to see her. He was disapproving, of course, though she felt that his heart wasn't entirely unsympathetic. Even though he told her Mr. Pieker had made him pay for the bucket of candy. Missy knew it must have gone hard with him to be put in the wrong by Mr. Pieker.

"Oh, father, I'm sorry!—I really am!"

Father patted her hand. He was an angel.

"Did you bring it home?" brightening at a thought.

"Bring what home?" asked father.

"Why, the candy."

"Of course not."

"I don't see why, if you had to pay for it. The bottom part wasn't hurt at all."

Father laughed then, actually laughed. She was glad to see the serious look removed from his face; but she still begrudged all that candy.

Nor was that the end of the part played by the candy. That night, as she was kneeling in her nightgown by the window, gazing out at the white moonlight and trying to summon the lovely thoughts the night's magic used to bring, the door opened softly and mother came tiptoeing in.

"You ought to be in bed, dear," she said. No, Missy reflected, she could never, never be really cross with mother. She climbed into bed and, with a certain degree of comfort, watched mother smooth up the sheet and fold the counterpane carefully over the foot-rail.

"Mrs. O'Neill just phoned," mother said. "Tess is very sick. It seems she and Arthur got hold of that bucket of candy."

"Oh," said Missy.

That was all she said, all she felt capable of saying. The twisted thoughts, emotions and revulsions which surge in us as we watch the inexplicable workings of Fate are often difficult of expression. But, after mother had kissed her good night and gone, she

lay pondering for a long time. Life is curiously unfair. That Tess and Arthur should have got the candy for which *she* suffered, that the very hours she'd been shut up with shame and disgrace *they* were gorging themselves, seemed her climactic crown of sorrow.

Yes, life was queer. . . .

Almost not worth while to try to be athletic—she didn't really like being athletic, anyway . . . she hoped they'd had the ordinary human decency to give Gypsy just a little bit . . . Gypsy was a darling . . . that wavy tail and those bright soft eyes and the white star . . . but you don't have to be really athletic to ride a pony—you don't have to wear breeches and do things like that . . . Arthur wasn't so much, anyway—he had freckles and red hair and there was nothing romantic about him. . . . Sir Galahad would never have been so scared of Mr. Pieker—he wouldn't have shoved the blame off onto a maiden in distress. . . . No, and she didn't think the King of Spain would, either . . . Or Rev. MacGill. . . . There were lots of things just as good as being athletic . . . there were . . . lots of things . . .

A moonbeam crept up the white sheet, to kiss the eyelids closed in sleep.

VIII

A Happy Downfall

Ah, pensive scholar, what is fame?—
A fitful tongue of fickle flame.
And what is prominence to me,
When a brown bird sings in the apple-tree?
Ah, mortal downfalls lose their sting
When World and Heart hear the call of Spring!
You ask me why mere friendship so
Outweighs all else that but comes to go? . . .
A truce, a truce to questioning:
"We two are friends," tells everything.
I think it vile to pigeon-hole
The pros and cons of a kindred soul.
(From Melissa's Improvement on Certain Older Poets.)

THE year Melissa was a high school Junior was fated to be an unforgettable epoch. In the space of a few short months, all mysteriously interwoven with their causes and effects, their trials turning to glory, their disappointments and surcease inexplicable, came revelations, swift and shifting, or what is really worth while in life. Oh, Life! And oh, when one is sixteen years old! That is an age, as many of us can remember, one begins really to *know* Life—a complex and absorbing epoch.

The first of these new vistas to unspread itself before Missy's eyes was nothing less dazzling than Travel.

She had never been farther away from home than Macon City, the local metropolis, or Pleasanton, where Uncle Charlie and Aunt Isabel lived and which wasn't even as big as Cherryvale; and neither place was a two-hours' train ride away. The most picturesque scenery she knew was at Rocky Ford; it was far from the place where the melons grow, but water, a ford and rocks were there, and it had always shone in that prairie land and in Missy's eyes as a haunt of nymphs, water-babies, the Great Spirit, and Nature's poetics generally—the Great Spirit was naturally associated with its inevitable legendary Indian love story. But when Aunt Isabel carelessly suggested that Missy, next summer, go to Colorado with her, how the local metropolis dwindled; how little and simple, though pretty, of course, appeared Rocky Ford.

Colorado quivered before her in images supernal. Colorado! Enchantment in the very name! And mountains, and eternal snow upon the peaks, and spraying waterfalls, and bright-painted gardens of the gods—oh, ecstasy!

And going with Aunt Isabel! Aunt Isabel was young, beautiful, and delightful. Aunt Isabel went to Colorado every summer!

But a whole year! That is, in truth, a long time and can bring forth much that is unforeseen, amazing, revolutionizing. Especially when one is sixteen and beginning really to know life.

Missy had always found life in Cherryvale absorbing. The past had been predominantly tinged with

the rainbow hues of dreams; with the fine, vague, beautiful thoughts that "reading" brings, and with such delicious plays of fancy as lend witchery to a high white moon, an arched blue sky, or rolling prairies—even to the tranquil town and the happenings of every day. Nothing could put magic into the humdrum life of school, and here she must struggle through another whole year of it before she might reach Colorado. That was a cloud, indeed, for one who wasn't "smart" like Beulah Crosswhite. Mathematics Missy found an inexplicable, unalloyed torture; history for all its pleasingly suggestive glimpses of a spacious past, laid heavy taxes on one not good at remembering dates.

But Missy was about to learn to take a more modern view of high school possibilities. Shortly before school opened Cousin Pete came to see his grandparents in Cherryvale. Perhaps Pete's filial devotion was due to the fact that Polly Currier resided in Cherryvale; Polly was attending the State University where Pete was a "Post-Grad." Missy listened to Cousin Pete's talk of college life with respect, admiration, and some unconscious envy. There was one word that rose, like cream on milk, or oil on water, or fat on soup, inevitably to the surface of his conversation.

"Does Polly Currier like college?" once inquired Missy, moved by politeness to broach what Pete must find an agreeable subject.

"Naturally," replied Pete, with the languor of an admittedly superior being. "She's prominent."

The word, "prominent," as uttered by him had more than impressiveness and finality. It was magnificent. It was as though one might remark languidly: "She? Oh, she's the Queen of Sheba"—or, "Oh, she's Mary Pickford."

Missy pondered a second, then asked:

"Prominent? How is a—what makes a person prominent?"

Pete elucidated in the large, patronizing manner of a kindly-disposed elder.

"Oh, being pretty—if you're a girl—and a good sport, and active in some line. A leader."

Missy didn't yet exactly see. She decided to make the problem specific.

"What makes Polly prominent?"

"Because she's the prettiest girl on the hill," Pete replied indulgently. "And *some* dancer. And crack basket-ball forward—Glee Club—Dramatic Club. Polly's got it over 'em forty ways running."

So ended the first lesson. The second occurred at the chance mention of one Charlie White, a Cherryvale youth likewise a student at the University.

"Oh, he's not very prominent," commented Pete, and his tone damned poor Charlie for all eternity.

"Why isn't he?" asked Missy interestedly.

"Oh, I don't know—he's just a dub."

"A dub?"

"Yep, a dub." Pete had just made a "date" with Polly, so he beamed on her benignantly as he explained further: "A gun—a dig—a greasy grind."

"But isn't a smart person ever prominent?"

"Oh, sometimes. It all depends."

"Is Polly Currier a grind?"

"I should hope not!" as if defending the lady from an insulting charge.

Missy looked puzzled; then asked:

"Does she ever pass?"

"Oh, now and then. Sometimes she flunks. Polly should worry!"

Here was strange news. One could be smart, devote oneself to study—be a "greasy grind"—and yet fail of prominence; and one could fail to pass—"flunk"—and yet climb to the pinnacle of prominence. Evidently smartness and studiousness had nothing to do with it, and Missy felt a pleasurable thrill. Formerly she had envied Beulah Crosswhite, who wore glasses and was preternaturally wise. But maybe Beulah Crosswhite was not so much. Manifestly it was more important to be prominent than smart.

Oh, if she herself could be prominent!

To be sure, she wasn't pretty like Polly Currier, or even like her own contemporary, Kitty Allen—though she had reason to believe that Raymond Bonner had said something to one of the other boys that sounded as if her eyes were a little nice. "Big Eyes" he had called her, as if that were a joke; but maybe it meant something pleasant. But the High School did not have a Glee Club or Dramatic Society offering one the chance to display leadership gifts. There was a basket-ball team, but Missy didn't "take to" athletics.

Missy brooded through long, secret hours.

The first week of September school opened, classes enrolled, and the business of learning again got under way. By the second week the various offshoots of educational life began to sprout, and notices were posted of the annual elections of the two "literary societies," Iolanthe and Mount Parnassus. The "programmes" of these bodies were held in the auditorium every other Friday, and each pupil was due for at least one performance a semester. Missy, who was an Iolanthian, generally chose to render a piano solo or an original essay. But everybody in school did that much—they had to—and only a few rose to the estate of being "officers."

The Iolanthians had two tickets up for election: the scholastic, headed by Beulah Crosswhite for president, and an opposition framed by some boys who complained that the honours always went to girls and that it was time men's rights were recognized. The latter faction put up Raymond Bonner as their candidate. Raymond was as handsome and gay as Beulah Crosswhite was learned.

It was a notable fight. When the day of election arrived, the Chemistry room in which the Iolanthians were gathered was electric with restrained excitement. On the first ballot Raymond and Beulah stood even. There was a second ballot—a third—a fourth. And still the deadlock, the atmosphere of tensity growing more vibrant every second. Finally a group of boys put their heads together. Then Raymond Bonner arose.

"In view of the deadlock which it seems impossible to break," be began, in the rather stilted manner which befits such assemblages, "I propose that we put up a substitute candidate. I propose the name of Miss Melissa Merriam."

Oh, dear heaven! For a second Missy was afraid she was going to cry—she didn't know why. But she caught Raymond's eye on her, smiling encouragement, and she mistily glowed back at him. And on the very first vote she was elected.

Yes. Miss Melissa Merriam was president of Iolanthe. She was prominent.

And Raymond? Of course Raymond had been prominent before, though she had never noticed it, and now he had helped her up to this noble elevation! He must think she would adorn it. Adorn!—it was a lovely word that Missy had just captured.

Though she had achieved her eminence by a fluke, Missy took fortune at the flood like one born for success. She mazed the whole school world by a meteoric display of unsuspected capacities. Herself she amazed most of all; she felt as if she were making the acquaintance of a stranger, an increasingly fascinating kind of stranger. How wonderful to find herself presiding over a "meeting" from the teacher's desk in the Latin room, or over a "programme" in the auditorium, with calm and superior dignity!

Missy, aflame with a new fire, was not content with the old hackneyed variety of "programme." It was she who conceived the idea of giving the first

minstrel show ever presented upon the auditorium boards. It is a tribute to Missy's persuasiveness when at white heat that the faculty permitted the show to go beyond its first rehearsal. The rehearsals Missy personally conducted, with Raymond aiding as her first lieutenant—and he would not have played second fiddle like that to another girl in the class—he said so. She herself chose the cast, contrived the "scenery"; and she and Raymond together wrote the dialogue and lyrics. It was wonderful how they could do things together! Missy felt she never could get into such a glow and find such lovely rhymes popping right up in her mind if she were working alone. And Raymond said the same. It was very strange. It was as if a mystic bond fired them both with new talents—Missy looked on mixed metaphors as objectionable only to Professor Sutton.

Her reputation—and Raymond's—soared, soared. Her literary talent placed her on a much higher plane than if she were merely "smart"—made her in the most perfect sense "prominent."

After the minstrel triumph it was no surprise when, at class elections, Melissa Merriam became president of the Juniors. A few months before Missy would have been overwhelmed at the turn of things, but now she casually mounted her new height, with assurance supreme.

It was as though always had the name of Melissa Merriam been a force. Raymond said no one else had a look-in.

At the end of the term prominence brought its reward: Missy failed in Geometry and was conditioned in Latin. Father looked grave over her report card.

"This is pretty bad, isn't it?" he asked.

Missy fidgeted. It gave her a guilty feeling to bring that expression to her indulgent father's face.

"I'm sorry, father. I know I'm not smart, but—" She hesitated.

Father took off his glasses and thoughtfully regarded her.

"I wasn't complaining of your not being 'smart'—'smart' people are often pests. The trouble's that this is worse than it's ever been. And to-day I got a letter from Professor Sutton. He says you evince no interest whatever in your work."

Missy felt a little indignant flare within her.

"He knows what responsibilities I have!"

"Responsibilities?" repeated father.

Here mother, who had been sitting quietly by, also with a disapproving expression, entered the discussion:

"I knew all that Iolanthe and class flummery would get her into trouble."

Flummery!

Missy's voice quavered. "That's a very important part of school life, mother! Class spirit and all—you don't understand!"

"I suppose parents are seldom able to keep up with the understanding of their children," replied mother, with unfamiliar sarcasm. "However, right

here's where I presume to set my foot down. If you fail again, in the spring examinations, you'll have to study and make it up this summer. You can't go with Aunt Isabel."

Lose the Colorado trip! The wonderful trip she had already lived through, in vivid prospect, a hundred times! Oh, mother couldn't be so cruel! But Missy's face dropped alarmingly.

"Now, mamma," began father, "I wouldn't—"

"I mean every word of it," reaffirmed mother with the voice of doom. "No grades, no holiday. Missy's got to learn balance and moderation. She lets any wild enthusiasm carry her off her feet. She's *got* to learn, before it's too late, to think and control herself."

There was a moment's heavy pause, then mother went on, significantly:

"And I don't know that you ought to buy that car this spring, papa."

The parents exchanged a brief glance, and Missy's heart dropped even lower. For months she had been teasing father to buy a car, as so many of the girls' fathers were doing. He had said, "Wait till spring," and now—the universe was draped in gloom.

However, there was a certain sombre satisfaction in reflecting that her traits of frailty should call forth such enthrallingly sinister comments. "Lets any wild enthusiasm carry her off her feet"—"before it's too late"—"must learn to control herself—"

Human nature is an interesting study, and especially one's own nature when one stands off and regards it as a problem alien, mysterious and complicated. Missy stared at the endangered recesses of her soul—and wondered what Raymond thought about these perils—for any girl. He liked her of course, but did he think she was too enthusiastic?

Yet such speculations did not, at the time, tie up with views about the Colorado trip. That was still the guiding star of all her hopes. She must study harder during the spring term and stave off the threatened and unspeakable calamity. It was a hard resolution to put through, especially when she conceived a marvellous idea—a "farce" like one Polly Currier told her about when she was home for her Easter vacation. Missy wrestled with temptation like some Biblical martyr of old, but the thought of Colorado kept her strong. And she couldn't help feeling a little noble when, mentioning to mother the discarded inspiration—without allusion to Colorado—she was praised for her adherence to duty.

The sense of nobility aided her against various tantalizing chances to prove anew her gifts of leadership, through latter March, through April, through early May—lengthening, balmy, burgeoning days when Spring brings all her brightly languid witchery in assault upon drab endeavour.

The weather must share the blame for what befell that fateful Friday of the second week in May. Blame? Of course there was plenty of blame from adults that must be laid somewhere; but as for

Missy, a floating kind of ecstasy was what that day woke in her first, and after the worst had happened—But let us see what did come to pass.

It was a day made for poets to sing about. A day for the young man to forget the waiting ledger on his desk and gaze out the window at skies so blue and deep as to invite the building of castles; for even his father to see visions of golf-course or fishing-boat flickering in the translucent air; for old Jeff to get out his lawn-mower and lazily add a metallic song to the hum of the universe. And for him or her who must sit at schoolroom desk, it was a day to follow the processes of blackboard or printed page with the eyes but not the mind, while the encaged spirit beat past the bars of dull routine to wing away in the blue.

Missy, sitting near an open window of the "study room" during the "second period," let dreamy eyes wander from the fatiguing *Q. E. D.'s* of the afternoon's Geometry lesson; the ugly tan walls, the sober array of national patriots hanging above the encircling blackboard, the sea of heads restlessly swaying over receding rows of desks, all faded hazily away. Her soul flitted out through the window, and suffused itself in the bit of bright, bright blue showing beyond the stand-pipe, in the soft, soft air that stole in to kiss her cheek, in the elusive fragrance of young, green, growing things, in the drowsy, drowsy sound of Mrs. Clifton's chickens across the way. . . .

Precious minutes were speeding by; she would not have her Geometry lesson. But Missy didn't bring

herself back to think of that; would not have cared, anyway. She let her soul stretch out, out, out.

Such is the sweet, subtle, compelling madness a day of Spring can bring one.

Missy had often felt the ecstasy of being swept out on the yearning demand for a new experience. Generally because of something suggestive in "reading" or in heavenly colour combinations or in sad music at twilight; but, now, for no definable reason at all, she felt her soul welling up and up in vague but poignant craving. She asked permission to get a drink of water. But instead of quenching her thirst, she wandered to the entry of the room occupied by Mathematics III A—Missy's own class, from which she was now sequestered by the cruel bar termed "failure-to-pass." Something was afoot in there; Missy put her ear to the keyhole; then she boldly opened the door.

A tempest of paper-wads, badinage and giggles greeted her. The teacher's desk was vacant. Miss Smith was at home sick, and the principal had put Mathematics III A on their honour. For a time Missy joined in their honourable pursuit of giggles and badinage. But Raymond had welcomed her as if the fun must mount to something yet higher when she came; she felt a "secret, deep, interior urge" to show what she could do. The seductive May air stole into her blood, a stealthy, intoxicating elixir, and finally the Inspiration came, with such tumultuous swiftness that she could never have told whence or how. Passed on to her fellows, it was caught up

with an ardour equally mad and unreckoning. One minute the unpastored flock of Mathematics III A were leaning out the windows, sniffing in the lilac scents wafted over from Mrs. Clifton's yard; the next they were scurrying, tip-toe, flushed, laughing, jostling, breathless, out through the cloak-room, down the stairs, through the side-door, across the stretch of school-yard, toward a haven beyond Mrs. Clifton's lilac hedge.

Where were they going? They did not know. Why had they started? They did not know. What the next step? They did not know. No thought nor reason in that onward rush; only one vast, enveloping, incoherent, tumultuous impulse—away! *away!* Away from dark walls into the open; away from the old into the new; away from the usual into the you-don't-know-what; away from "you must not" into "you may." The wild, free, bright, heedless urge of Spring!

Behind their fragrant rampart they paused, for a second, to spin about in a kind of mental and spiritual whirlpool. Some began breaking off floral sprays to decorate hat-band or shirt-waist. But Missy, feeling her responsibility as a leader, glanced back, through leafy crevices, at those prison-windows open and ominously near.

"We mustn't stay here!" she admonished. "We'll get caught!"

As if an embodiment of warning, just then Mrs. Clifton emerged out on her front porch; she looked as if she might be going to shout at them. But Ray-

mond waited to break off a lilac cluster for Missy. He was so cool about it; it just showed how much he was like the Black Prince—though of course no one would "understand" if you said such a thing.

The fragrantly beplumed company sped across the green Clifton yard, ruthlessly over the Clifton vegetable garden, to the comparative retreat of Silver Street, beyond. But they were not yet safe—away! away! Missy urged them westward, for no defined reason save that this direction might increase their distance from the danger zone of the High School.

Still without notion of whither bound, the runaways, moist and dishevelled, found themselves down by the railroad tracks. There, in front of the Pacific depot, stood the 10:43 "accommodation" for Osawatomie and other points south. Another idea out of the blue!

"Let's go to Osawatomie!" cried Missy.

The accommodation was puffing laboriously into action as the last Junior clambered pantingly on. But they'd all got on! They were on their way!

But not on their way to Osawatomie.

For before they had all found satisfactory places on the red plush seats, where it was hard to sit still with that bright balminess streaming in through the open windows—hard to sit still, or to think, or to do anything but flutter up and down and laugh and chatter about nothing at all—the conductor appeared.

"Tickets, please!"

A trite and commonplace phrase, but potent to

plunge errant, winging fancies down to earth. The chattering ceased short. No one had thought of tickets, nor even of money. The girls of the party looked appalled—in Cherryvale the girls never dreamed of carrying money to school; then furtively they glanced at the boys. Just as furtively the boys were exploring into pockets, but though they brought forth a plentiful salvage of the anomalous treasure usually to be found in school-boys' pockets, the display of "change" was pathetic. Raymond had a quarter, and that was more than anyone else turned out.

The conductor impatiently repeated:

"Tickets, please!"

Then Missy, feeling that financial responsibility must be recognized in a class president, began to put her case with a formal dignity that impressed every one but the conductor.

"We're the Junior class of the Cherryvale High School—we wish to go to Osawatomie. Couldn't we—maybe—?"

Formal dignity broke down, her voice stuck in her throat, but her eyes ought to have been enough. They were big and shining eyes, and when she made them appealing they had been known to work wonders with father and mother and other grown-ups, even with the austere Professor Sutton. But this burly figure in the baggy blue uniform had a face more like a wooden Indian than a human grown-up—and an old, dyspeptic wooden Indian at that. Missy's eyes were to avail her nothing that hour.

"Off you get at the watering-tank," he ordained. "The whole pack of you."

And at the watering-tank off they got.

And then, as often follows a mood of high adventure, there fell upon the festive group a moment of pause, of unnatural quiet, of "let down."

"Well, what're we going to do *now?*" queried somebody.

"We'll do whatever Missy says," said Raymond, just as if he were Sir Walter Raleigh speaking of the Virgin Queen. It was a wonder someone didn't start teasing him about her; but everyone was too taken up waiting for Missy to proclaim. She set her very soul vibrating; shut her eyes tightly a moment to think; and, as if in proof that Providence helps them who must help others, almost instantly she opened them again.

"Rocky Ford!"

Just like that, out of the blue, a quick, unfaltering, almost unconscious cry of the inspired. And, with resounding acclaim, her followers caught it up:

"Rocky Ford! Rocky Ford!"—"That's the ticket!"—"We'll have a picnic!"—"Rocky Ford! Rocky Ford!"

Rocky Ford, home of nymphs, water-babies and Indian legend, was only half a mile away. Again it shone in all its old-time romantic loveliness on Missy's inward eye. And for a fact it was a good May-time picnic place.

That day everything about the spot seemed invested with a special kind of beauty, the kind of

beauty you feel so poignantly in stories and pictures but seldom meet face to face in real life. The Indian maiden became a memory you must believe in: she had loved someone and they were parted somehow and she was turned into a swan or something. Off on either side the creek, the woods stretched dim and mysterious; but nearby, on the banks, the little new leaves stirred and sparkled in the sun like green jewels; and the water dribbled and sparkled over the flat white stones of the ford like a million swishing diamonds; and off in the distance there were sounds which may have been birds—or, perhaps, the legendary maiden singing; and, farther away, somewhere, a faint clanging music which must be cow-bells, only they had a remote heavenly quality rare in cow-bells.

And, all the while, the sun beaming down on the ford, intensely soft and bright. Why is it that the sun can seem so much softer and brighter in some places than in others?

Missy felt that soft brightness penetrating deeper and deeper into her being. It seemed a sort of limpid, shining tide flowing through to her very soul; it made her blood tingle, and her soul quiver. And, in some mysterious way, the presence of Raymond Bonner, consciousness of Raymond—Raymond himself—began to seem all mixed up with this ineffable, surging effulgence. Missy recognized that she had long experienced a secret, strange, shy kind of feeling toward Raymond. He was so handsome and so gay, and his dark eyes told her so plainly that he

liked her, and he carried her books home for her despite the fact that the other boys teased him. The other girls had teased Missy, too, so that sometimes she didn't know whether she was more happy or embarrassed over Raymond's admiration.

But, to-day, everyone seemed lifted above such childish rudeness. When Missy had first led off from the watering-tank toward Rocky Ford, Raymond had taken his place by her side, and he maintained it there masterfully though two or three other boys tried to include themselves in the class president's group—"buttinskys," Raymond termed them.

Once, as they walked together along the road, Raymond took hold of her hand. He had done that much before, but this was different. Those other times did not count. She knew that this was different and that he, too, knew it was different. They glanced at each other, and then quickly away.

Then, when they turned off into a field, to avoid meeting people who might ask questions, Raymond held together the barbed wires of the fence very carefully, so she could creep under without mishap. And when they neared the woods, he kicked all the twigs from her path, and lifted aside the underbrush lest it touch her face. And at each opportunity for this delicious solicitude they would look at each other, and then quickly away.

That was in many ways an unforgettable picnic; many were the unheard-of things carried out as soon as thought of. For example, the matter of lunch. What need to go hungry when there were eggs in a

farmer's henhouse not a half-mile away, and potatoes in the farmer's store-house, and sundry other edibles all spread out, as if waiting, in the farmer's cellar? (Blessings on the farmer's wife for going avisiting that day!)

The boys made an ingenious oven of stones and a glorious fire of brush; and the girls made cunning dishes out of big, clean-washed leaves. Then, when the potatoes and eggs were ready, all was devoured with a zest that paid its own tribute to the fair young cooks; and the health of the fair young cooks was drunk in Swan Creek water, cupped in sturdy masculine hands; and even the girls tried to drink from those same cups, laughing so they almost strangled. A mad, merry and supremely delightful feast.

After she had eaten, for some reason Missy felt a craving to wander off somewhere and sit still a while. She would have loved to stretch out in the grass, and half-close her eyes, and gaze up at the bits of shining, infinite blue of the sky, and dream. But there was Raymond at her elbow—and she wanted, even more than she wanted to be alone and dream, Raymond to be there at her elbow.

Then, too, there were all the others. Someone shouted:

"What'll we do now? What'll we do, Missy ?"

So the class president dutifully set her wits to work. Around the flat white stones of the ford the water was dribbling, warm, soft, enticing.

"Let's go wading!" she cried.

Wading!

Usually Missy would have shrunk from appearing before boys in bare feet. But this was a special kind of day which held no room for embarrassment; and, more quickly than it takes to tell it, shoes and stockings were off and the new game was on. Missy stood on a stepping-stone, suddenly diffident; the water now looked colder and deeper, the whispering cascadelets seemed to roar like breakers on a beach. The girls were all letting out little squeals as the water chilled their ankles, and the boys made feints of chasing them into deeper water.

Raymond pursued Missy, squealing and skipping from stone to stone till, unexpectedly, she lost her slippery footing and went sprawling into the shallow stream.

"Oh, Missy! I'm sorry!" She felt his arms tugging at her. Then she found herself standing on the bank, red-faced and dripping, feeling very wretched and very happy at the same time—wretched because Raymond should see her in such plight; happy because he was making such a fuss over her notwithstanding.

He didn't seem to mind her appearance, but took his hat and began energetically to fan her draggled hair.

"I wish my hair was curly like Kitty Allen's," she said.

"I like it this way," said Raymond, unplaiting the long braids so as to fan them better.

"But hers curls up all the prettier when it's wet. Mine strings."

"Straight hair's the nicest," he said with finality.

He liked straight hair best! A wave of celestial bliss stole over her. It was wonderful: the big, fleecy clouds so serenely beautiful up in the enigmatic blue; the sun pouring warmly down and drying her dress in uneven patches; the whisperings of the green-jewelled leaves and the swishing of the diamond-bubbles on the stones; the drowsy, mysterious sounds from far away in the woods, and fragrance everywhere; and everything seeming delightfully remote; even the other boys and girls—everything and everybody save Raymond, standing there so patiently fanning the straight hair he admired.

Oh, the whole place was entrancing, entrancing in a new way; and her sensations, too, were entrancing in a new way. Even when Raymond, as he manipulated her hair, inadvertently pulled the roots, the prickly pains seemed to tingle on down through her being in little tremors of pure ecstasy.

Raymond went on fanning her hair.

"Curly hair's messy looking," he observed after a considerable pause during which, evidently, his thoughts had remained centred on this pleasing theme.

And then, all of a sudden, Missy found herself saying an inexplicable, unheard-of thing:

"You can have a lock—if you want to."

She glanced up, and then quickly down. And she felt herself blushing again; she didn't exactly like to blush—yet—yet—

"*Do* I want it?"

Already Raymond had dropped his improvised fan and was fumbling for his knife.

"Where?" he asked.

Missy shivered deliciously at the imminence of that bright steel blade; what if he should let it slip? —but, just then, even mutilation, provided it be at Raymond's hand, didn't seem too terrible.

"Wherever you want," she murmured.

"All right—I'll take a snip here where it twines round your ear—it looks so sort of affectionate."

She giggled with him. Of course it was all terribly silly—and yet—

Then there followed a palpitant moment while she held her breath and shut her eyes. A derisive shout caused her to open them quickly. There stood Don Jones, grinning.

"Missy gave Raymond a lock of her hair! Missy gave Raymond a lock of her hair!"

Missy's face grew hot; blushing was not now a pleasure; she looked up, then down; she didn't know where to look.

"Gimme one, too! You got to play fair, Missy—gimme one, too!"

Then, in that confusion of spirit, she heard her voice, which didn't seem to be her own voice but a stranger's, saying:

"All right, you can have one, too, if you want it, Don."

Don forthwith advanced. Missy couldn't forebear a timid glance toward Raymond. Raymond was not looking pleased. She wished she might assure him

she didn't really want to give the lock to Don, and yet, at the same time, she felt strangely thrilled at that lowering look on Raymond's face. It was curious. She wanted Raymond to be happy, yet she didn't mind his being just a little bit unhappy—this way. Oh, how complicated and fascinating life can be!

During the remainder of their stay at the ford Missy was preoccupied with this new revelation of herself and with a furtive study of Raymond whose continued sulkiness was the cause of it. Raymond didn't once come to her side during all that endless three-mile tramp back to Cherryvale; but she was conscious of his eye on her as she trudged along beside Don Jones. She didn't feel like talking to Don Jones. Nor was the rest of the crowd, now, a lively band; it was harder to laugh than it had been in the morning; harder even to talk. And when they did talk, little unsuspected irritabilities began to gleam out. For now, when weary feet must somehow cover those three miles, thoughts of the journey's end began to rise up in the truants' minds. During the exalted moments of adventure they hadn't thought of consequences. That's a characteristic of exalted moments. But now, so to speak, the ball was over, the roses all shattered and faded, and the weary dancers must face the aftermath of to-morrow. . . .

And Missy, trudging along the dusty road beside Don Jones who didn't count, felt all kinds of shadows rising up to eclipse brightness in her soul. What would Professor Sutton do?—he was fearfully

strict. And father and mother would never understand. . . .

If only Don Jones would stop babbling to her! Why did he persist in walking beside her, anyway? That lock of hair didn't mean anything! She wished she hadn't given it to him; why *had* she, anyway? She herself couldn't comprehend why, and Raymond would never, never comprehend.

The farther she walked, the less she saw the pleasanter aspects of Raymond's jealousy and the more what might be the outcome of it. Perhaps he'd never have anything to do with her again. That would be terrible! And she'd have such a short time to try making it up. For in less than a month she'd have to go with Aunt Isabel to Colorado; and, then, she wouldn't see Raymond for weeks and weeks. Colorado! It was like talking of going to the moon, a dreary, dead, far-off moon, with no one in it to speak to. Aunt Isabel? Aunt Isabel was sweet, but she was so old—nearly thirty! How could she, Missy, go and leave Raymond misunderstanding her so?

But who can tell how Fate may work to confound rewards and punishments!

It was to become a legend in the Cherryvale High School how, once on a day in May, a daring band ran away from classes and how the truant class, *in toto*, was suspended for the two closing weeks of the semester, with no privilege of "making up" the grades. And the legend runs that one girl, and the most prominent girl in the class at that, by reason

of this sentence fell just below the minimum grade required to "pass."

Yes; Missy failed again. Of course that was very bad. And taking her disgrace home—indeed, that was horrid. As she faced homeward she felt so heavy inside that she knew she could never eat her dinner. Besides, she was walking alone—Raymond hadn't walked home with her since the wretched picnic. She sighed a sigh that was not connected with the grade card in her pocket. For one trouble dwarfs another in this world; and friendship is more than honours—a sacred thing, friendship! Only Raymond was so unreasonable over Don's lock of hair; yet, for all the painfulness of Raymond's crossness, Missy smiled the littlest kind of a down-eyed, secret sort of smile as she thought of it. . . . It was so wonderful and foolish and interesting how much he cared that Missy began to question what he'd do if she got Don to give her a lock of *his* hair.

Then she sobered suddenly, as you do at a funeral after you have forgotten where you are and then remember. That card was an unpleasant thing to take home! . . . Just what did Raymond mean by giving Kitty Allen a lock of *his* hair? And doing it before Missy herself—"Kitty, here's that lock I promised you"—just like that. Then he had laughed and joked as if nothing unusual had happened—only was he watching her out of the corner of his eye when he thought she wasn't looking? That was the real question. The idea of Raymond trying to make her jealous! How simple-minded boys are!

But, after all, what a dear, true friend he had proved himself in the past—before she offended him. And how much more is friendship than mere pleasures like travel—like going to Colorado.

But *was* he jealous? If he was—Missy felt an inexplicable kind of bubbling in her heart at that idea. But if he wasn't—well, of course it was natural she should wonder whether Raymond looked on friendship as a light, come-and-go thing, and on locks of hair as meaning nothing at all. For he had never been intimate with Kitty Allen; and he had *said* he didn't like curly hair. Yet, probably, he had one of Kitty Allen's ringlets. . . . Missy felt a new, hideous weight pulling down her heart.

Of course *she* had given that straight wisp to Don Jones—but what else could she do to keep him from telling? Oh, life is a muddle! And here, in less than a week, Aunt Isabel would come by and whisk her off to the ends of the earth; and she might have to go without really knowing what Raymond meant. . . .

And oh, yes—that old card! How dreary life can be as one grows older.

Missy waited to show the card till her father came home to supper—she knew it was terribly hard for father to be stern. But when Missy, all mute appeal, extended him the report, he looked it over in silence and then passed it on to mother. Mother, too, examined it with maddening care.

"Well," she commented at last. "I see you've failed again."

"It was all the fault of those two weeks' grades," the culprit tried to explain. "If it hadn't been for that—"

"But there *was* 'that.'" Mother's tone was terribly unsympathetic.

"I didn't think of grades—*then*."

"No, that's the trouble. I've warned you, Missy. You've *got* to learn to think. You'll have to stay home and make up those grades this summer. You'd better write to Aunt Isabel at once, so she won't be inconvenienced."

Mother's voice had the quiet ring of doom.

Tender-hearted father looked away, out the window, so as not to see the disappointment on his daughter's face. But Missy was gazing down her nose to hide eyes that were shining. Soon she made an excuse to get away.

Out in the summerhouse it was celestially beautiful and peaceful. And, magically, all this peace and beauty seemed to penetrate into her and become a part of herself. The glory of the pinkish-mauve sunset stole in and delicately tinged her so; the scent of the budding ramblers, and of the freshly-mowed lawn, became her own fragrant odour; the soft song of the breeze rocking the leaves became her own soul's lullaby. Oh, it was a heavenly world, and the future bloomed with enchantments! *She could stay in Cherryvale this summer!* Dear Cherryvale! Green prairies were so much nicer than snow-covered mountains, and gently sloping hills than sharp-pointing peaks; and much, much nicer

than tempestuous waterfalls was the sweet placidity of Swan Creek. Dear Swan Creek. . . .

The idea of Raymond's trying to make her jealous! How simple-minded boys are! But what a dear, true friend he was, and how much more is friendship than mere pleasures like travel—or prominence or fine grades or anything. . . .

It was at this point in her cogitations that Missy, seeing her Anthology—an intimate poetic companion—where she'd left it on a bench, dreamily picked it up, turned a few pages, and then was moved to write. We have borrowed her product to head this story.

Meanwhile, back in the house, her father might have been heard commenting on the noble behaviour of his daughter.

"Didn't let out a single whimper—brave little thing! We must see to it that she has a good time at home—poor young one! I think we'd better get the car this summer, after all."

IX

Dobson Saves the Day

IT was two years after the Spanish war; and she was seventeen years old and about to graduate.

On the Senior class roster of the Cherryvale High School she was catalogued as Melissa Merriam, well down—in scholarship's token—toward the tail-end of twenty-odd other names. To the teachers the list meant only the last young folks added to a back-reaching line of girls and boys who for years and years had been coming to "Commencement" with "credits" few or many, large expectant eyes fixed on the future, and highly uncertain habits of behaviour; but, to the twenty-odd, such dead prosiness about themselves would have been inconceivable even in teachers.

And Missy?

Well, there were prettier girls in the class, and smarter girls—and boys, too; yet she was the one from all that twenty-odd who had been chosen to deliver the Valedictory. Did there ever exist a maid who did not thrill to proof that she was popular with her mates? And when that tribute carries with it all the possibilities of a Valedictory—double, treble the exultation.

The Valedictory! When Missy sat in the classroom, exhausted with the lassitudinous warmth of spring and with the painful uncertainty of whether she'd be called to translate the Vergil passage she hadn't mastered, visions of that coming glory would rise to brighten weary hours; and the last thing at night, in falling asleep, as the moon stole in tenderly to touch her smiling face, she took them to her dreams. She saw a slender girl in white, standing alone on a lighted stage, gazing with luminous eyes out on a darkened auditorium. Sometimes they had poky old lectures in that Opera House. Somebody named Ridgely Holman Dobson was billed to lecture there now—before Commencement; but Missy hated lectures; her vision was of something lifted far above such dismal, useful communications. She saw a house as hushed as when little Eva dies—all the people listening to the girl up there illumined: the lift and fall of her voice, the sentiments fine and noble and inspiring. They followed the slow grace of her arms and hands—it was, indeed, as if she held them in the hollow of her hand. And then, finally, when she had come to the last undulating cadence, the last vibrantly sustained phrase, as she paused and bowed, there was a moment of hush—and then the applause began. Oh, what applause! And then, slowly, graciously, modestly but with a certain queenly pride, the shining figure in white turned and left the stage.

She could see it all: the way her "waved" hair would fluff out and catch the light like a kind of halo,

and each one of the nine organdie ruffles that were going to trim the bottom of her dress; she could even see the glossy, dark green background of potted palms—mother had promised to lend her two biggest ones. Yes, she could see it and hear it to the utmost completeness—save for one slight detail: that was the *words* of the girlish and queenly speaker. It seemed all wrong that she, who wasn't going to be a dull lecturer, should have to use words, and so many of them! You see, Missy hadn't yet written the Valedictory.

But that didn't spoil her enjoyment of the vision; it would all come to her in time. Missy believed in Inspiration. Mother did not.

Mother had worried all through the four years of her daughter's high school career—over "grades" or "exams" or "themes" or whatnot. She had fretted and urged and made Missy get up early to study; had even punished her. And, now, she was *sure* Missy would let time slide by and never get the Valedictory written on time. The two had already "had words" over it. Mother was dear and tender and sweet, and Missy would rather have her for mother than any other woman in Cherryvale, but now and then she was to be feared somewhat.

Sometimes she would utter an ugly, upsetting phrase:

"How *can* you dilly-dally so, Missy? You put everything off!—put off—put off! Now, go and try to get that thesis started!"

There was nothing for Missy to do but go and try

to obey. She took tablet and pencil out to the summerhouse, where it was always inspiringly quiet and beautiful; she also took along the big blue-bound Anthology from the living-room table—an oft-tapped fount; but even reading poetry didn't seem able to lift her to the creative mood. And you have to be in the mood before you can create, don't you? Missy felt this necessity vaguely but strongly; but she couldn't get it across to mother.

And even worse than mother's reproaches was when father finally gave her a "talking to"; father was a big, wise, but usually silent man, so that when he did speak his words seemed to carry a double force. Missy's young friends were apt to show a little awe of father, but she knew he was enormously kind and sympathetic. Long ago—oh, years before—when she was a little girl, she used to find it easier to talk to him than to most grown-ups; about all kinds of unusual things—the strange, mysterious, fascinating thoughts that come to one. But lately, for some reason, she had felt more shy with father. There was much she feared he mightn't understand—or, perhaps, she feared he *might* understand.

So, in this rather unsympathetic domestic environment, the class Valedictorian, with the kindling of her soul all laid, so to speak, uneasily awaited the divine spark. It was hard to maintain an easy assumption that all was well; especially after the affair of the hats got under way.

Late in April Miss Ackerman, the Domestic Science teacher, had organized a special night class in

millinery which met, in turns, at the homes of the various members. The girls got no "credit" for this work, but they seemed to be more than compensated by the joy of creating, with their own fingers, new spring hats which won them praise and admiration. Kitty Allen's hat was particularly successful. It was a white straw "flat," faced and garlanded with blue. Missy looked at its picturesque effect, posed above her "best friend's" piquantly pretty face, with an envy which was augmented by the pardonable note of pride in Kitty's voice as she'd say: "Oh, do you *really* like it?—I made it myself, you know."

If only she, Missy, might taste of this new kind of joy! She was not a Domestic Science girl; but, finally, she went to Miss Ackerman and—oh, rapture! —obtained permission to enter the millinery class.

However, there was still the more difficult matter of winning mother's consent. As Missy feared, Mrs. Merriam at once put on her disapproving look.

"No, Missy. You've already got your hands full. Have you started the thesis yet?"

"Oh, mother!—I'll get the thesis done all right! And this is such a fine chance!—*all* the girls are learning how to make their own hats. And I thought, maybe, after I'd learned how on my own, that maybe I could make *you* one. Do you remember that adorable violet straw you used to have when I was a little girl?—poke shape and with the pink rose? I remember father always said it was the most becoming hat you ever had. And I was thinking, maybe, I could make one something like that!"

"I'm afraid I've outgrown pink roses, dear." But mother was smiling a soft, reminiscent little shadow of a smile.

"But you haven't outgrown the poke shape—and *violet!* Oh, mother!"

"Well, perhaps—we'll see. But you mustn't let it run away with you. You *must* get that thesis started."

Not for nothing had Missy been endowed with eyes that could shine and a voice that could quaver; yes, and with an instinct for just the right argument to play upon the heart-strings.

She joined the special night class in millinery. She learned to manipulate troublesome coils of wire and pincers, and to evolve a strange, ghostly sl eleton-thing called a "frame," but when this was finally covered with crinoline and tedious rows-on-rows of straw braid, drab drudgery was over and the deliciousness began.

Oh, the pure rapture of "trimming"! Missy's first venture was a wide, drooping affair, something the shape of Kitty Allen's, only her own had a much subtler, more soul-satisfying colour scheme. The straw was a subtle blue shade—the colour Raymond Bonner, who was a classmate and almost a "beau," wore so much in neckties—and the facing shell-pink, a delicate harmony; but the supreme ecstasy came with placing the little silken flowers, pink and mauve and deeper subtle-blue, in effective composition upon that heavenly background; and, in just the one place, a glimpse of subtle-blue ribbon, a sheen as gracious as achieved by the great Creator when, with a mas-

ter's eye, on a landscape he places a climactic stroke of shining blue water. Indeed, He Himself surely can view His handiwork with no more sense of gratification than did Missy, regarding that miracle of colour which was her own creation.

Oh, to create! To feel a blind, vague, ineffable urge within you, stealing out to tangibility in colour and form! Earth—nor Heaven, either—can produce no finer rapture.

Missy's hat was duly admired. Miss Ackerman said she was a "real artist"; when she wore it to Sunday-school everybody looked at her so much she found it hard to hold down a sense of unsabbatical pride; father jocosely said she'd better relinquish her dreams of literary fame else she'd deprive the world of a fine milliner; and even mother admitted that Mrs. Anna Stubbs, the leading milliner, couldn't have done better. However, she amended: "Now, don't forget your school work, dear. Have you decided on the subject of your thesis yet?"

Missy had not. But, by this time, the hat business was moving so rapidly that she had even less time to worry over anything still remote, like the thesis—plenty of time to think of that; now, she was dreaming of how the rose would look blooming radiantly from this soft bed of violet straw; . . . and, now, how becoming to Aunt Nettie would be this misty green, with cool-looking leaves and wired silver gauze very pure and bright like angels' wings—dear Aunt Nettie didn't have much "taste," and Missy indulged in a certain righteous glow in thus

providing her with a really becoming, artistic hat. Then, after Aunt Nettie's, she planned one for Marguerite. Marguerite was the hired girl, mulatto, and had the racial passion for strong colour. So Missy conceived for her a creation that would be at once satisfying to wearer and beholder. How wonderful with one's own hands to be able to dispense pleasure! Missy, working, felt a peculiarly blended joy; it is a gratification, indeed, when a pleasing occupation is seasoned with the fine flavour of noble altruism.

She hadn't yet thought of a theme for the Valedictory, and mother was beginning to make disturbing comments about "this hat mania," when, by the most fortuitous chance, while she was working on Marguerite's very hat—in fact, *because* she was working on it—she hit upon a brilliantly possible idea for the Valedictory.

She was rummaging in a box of discarded odds and ends for "trimmings." The box was in mother's store-closet, and Missy happened to observe a pile of books up on the shelf. Books always interested her, and even with a hat on her mind she paused a moment to look over the titles. The top volume was "Ships That Pass in the Night"—she had read that a year or so ago—a delightful book, though she'd forgotten just what about. She took it down and opened it, casually, at the title page. And there, in fine print beneath the title, she read:

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shewn, and a distant voice in the darkness;
So, on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice—then darkness again, and a silence.

Standing there in the closet door, Missy read the stanza a second time—a third. And, back again at her work, fingers dawdled while eyes took on a dreamy, preoccupied expression. For phrases were still flitting through her head: "we pass and speak one another" . . . "then darkness again, and a silence" . . .

Very far away it took you—very far, right out on the vast, surging, mysterious sea of Life!

The sea of Life! . . . People, like ships, always meeting one another—only a look and a voice—and then passing on into the silence. . . .

Oh, that was an idea! Not just a shallow, sentimental pretense, but a real idea, "deep," stirring and fine. What a glorious Valedictory *that* would make!

And presently, when she was summoned to supper, she felt no desire to talk; it was so pleasant just to listen to those phrases faintly and suggestively resounding. All the talk around her came dimly and, sometimes, so lost was she in hazy delight that she didn't hear a direct question.

Finally father asked:

"What's the day-dream, Missy?—thinking up a hat for *me?*"

Missy started, and forgot to note that his enquiry was facetious.

"No," she answered quite seriously, "I haven't finished Marguerite's yet."

"Yes," cut in mother, in the tone of reproach so often heard these days, "she's been frittering away

the whole afternoon. And not a glimmer for the thesis yet!"

At that Missy, without thinking, unwarily said:

"Oh, yes, I have, mother."

"Oh," said her mother interestedly. "What is it?"

Missy suddenly remembered and blushed—grown-ups seldom understand unless you're *definite*.

"Well," she amended diffidently, "I've got the subject."

"What is it?" persisted mother.

Everybody was looking at Missy. She poured the cream over her berries, took a mouthful; but they all kept looking at her, waiting.

"'Ships That Pass in the Night,'" she had to answer.

"For Heaven's sake!" ejaculated Aunt Nettie. "What're you going to write about *that?*"

This was the question Missy had been dreading. She dreaded it because she herself didn't know just *what* she was going to write about it. Everything was still in the first vague, delightful state of just *feeling* it—without any *words* as yet; and grown-ups don't seem to understand about this. But they were all staring at her, so she must say something.

"Well, I haven't worked it out exactly—it's just sort of pouring in over me."

"*What's* pouring over you?" demanded Aunt Nettie.

"Why—the sea of Life," replied Missy desperately.

"For Heaven's sake!" commented Aunt Nettie again.

"It sounds vague; very vague," said father. Was he smiling or frowning?—he had such a queer look in his eyes. But, as he left the table, he paused behind her chair and laid a very gentle hand on her hair.

"Like to go out for a spin in the car?"

But mother declined for her swiftly. "No, Missy must work on her thesis this evening."

So, after supper, Missy took tablet and pencil once more to the summerhouse. It was unusually beautiful out there—just the kind of evening to harmonize with her uplifted mood. Day was ending in still and brilliant serenity. The western sky an immensity of benign light, and draped with clouds of faintly tinted gauze.

"Another day is dying," Missy began to write; then stopped.

The sun sank lower and lower, a reddening ball of sacred fire and, as if to catch from it a spark, Missy sat gazing at it as she chewed her pencil; but no words came to be caught down in pencilled tangibility. Oh, it hurt!—all this aching sweetness in her, surging through and through, and not able to bring out one *word!*

"Well?" enquired mother when, finally, she went back to the house.

Missy shook her head.

Mother sighed; and Missy felt the sigh echoing in her own heart. Why were words, relatively so much

less than inspiration, yet so important for inspiration's expression? And why were they so maddeningly elusive?

For a while, in her little white bed, she lay and stared hopelessly out at the street lamp down at the corner; the glow brought out a beautiful diffusive haze, a misty halo. "Only a signal shewn" . . .

The winking street lamp seemed to gaze back at her. . . . "Sometimes a signal flashes from out the darkness" . . . "Only a look" . . . "*But who can comprehend the unfathomable influence of a look? —It may come to a soul wounded and despairing—a soul caught in a wide-sweeping tempest—a soul sad and weary, longing to give up the struggle. . . .*"

Where did those words, ringing faintly in her consciousness, come from? She didn't know, was now too sleepy to ponder deeply. But they had come; that was a promising token. To-morrow more would come; the Valedictory would flow on out of her soul—or into her soul, whichever way it was—in phrases serene, majestic, ineffable.

Missy's eyelids fluttered; the street lamp's halo grew more and more irradiant; gleamed out to illumine, resplendently, a slender girl in white standing on a lighted stage, gazing with luminous eyes out on a darkened auditorium, a house as hushed as when little Eva dies. All the people were listening to the girl up there speaking—the rhythmic lift and fall of her voice, the sentiments fine and noble and inspiring:

"Ships that pass in the night and speak each other

in passing. . . . So, on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another. . . . Only a look and a voice . . . *But who can comprehend the unfathomable influence of a look? . . . which may come to a soul sad and weary, longing to give up the struggle. . . .* "

When she awoke next morning raindrops were beating a reiterative plaint against the window, and the sound seemed very beautiful. She liked lying in bed, staring out at the upper reaches of sombre sky. She liked it to be rainy when she woke up—there was something about leaden colour everywhere and falling rain that made you fit for nothing but placid staring, yet, at the same time, pleasantly meditative. Then was the time that the strange big things which filter through your dreams linger evanescently in your mind to ponder over.

"*Only a look and a voice—but who can comprehend the—the—the unfathomable influence of a look? It may come to a soul—may come to a soul—*"

Bother! How *did* that go?

Missy shut her eyes and tried to resummon the vision, to rehear those rhythmic words so fraught with wisdom. But all she saw was a sort of heterogeneous mass of whirling colours, and her thoughts, too, seemed to be just a confused and meaningless jumble. Only her *feeling* seemed to remain. She could hardly bear it; why is it that you can feel with that intolerably fecund kind of ache while *thoughts* refuse to come?

She finally gave it up, and rose and dressed. It was one of those mornings when clothes seem pos-

sessed of some demon so that they refuse to go on right. At breakfast she was unwontedly cross, and "talked back" to Aunt Nettie so that mother made her apologize. At that moment she hated Aunt Nettie, and even almost disliked mother. Then she discovered that Nicky, her little brother, had mischievously hidden her strap of books and, all of a sudden, she did an unheard-of thing: she slapped him! Nicky was so astonished he didn't cry; he didn't even run and tell mother, but Missy, seeing that hurt, bewildered look on his face, felt greater remorse than any punishment could have evoked. She loved Nicky dearly; how *could* she have done such a thing? But she remembered having read that Poe and Byron and other geniuses often got irritable when in creative mood. Perhaps that was it. The reflection brought a certain consolation.

But, at school, things kept on going wrong. In the Geometry class she was assigned the very "proposition" she'd been praying to elude; and, then, she was warned by the teacher—and not too privately—that if she wasn't careful she'd fail to pass; and that, of course, would mean she couldn't graduate. At the last minute to fail!—after Miss Simpson had started making her dress, and the invitations already sent to the relatives, and all!

And finally, just before she started home, Professor Sutton, the principal, had to call her into his office for a report on her thesis. The manuscript had to be handed in for approval, and was already past due. Professor Sutton was very stern with her; he said

some kind of an outline, anyway, *had* to be in by the end of the week. Of course, being a grown-up and a teacher besides, he believed everything should be done on time, and it would be useless to try to explain to him even if one could.

Raymond Bonner was waiting to walk home with her. Raymond often walked home with her and Missy was usually pleased with his devotion; he was the handsomest and most popular boy in the class. But, to-day, even Raymond jarred on her. He kept talking, talking, and it was difficult for her preoccupied mind to find the right answer in the right place. He was talking about the celebrity who was to give the "Lyceum Course" lecture that evening. The lecturer's name was Dobson. Oh uninspiring name!—Ridgeley Holman Dobson. He was a celebrity because he'd done something-or-other heroic in the Spanish war. Missy didn't know just what it was, not being particularly interested in newspapers and current events, and remote things that didn't matter. But Raymond evidently knew something about Dobson aside from his being just prominent.

"I only hope he kisses old Miss Lightner!" he said, chortling.

"Kisses her?" repeated Missy, roused from her reveries. Why on earth should a lecturer kiss anybody, above all Miss Lightner, who was an old maid and not attractive despite local gossip about her being "man-crazy"? "Why would he kiss Miss Lightner?"

Raymond looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, haven't you heard about *him?*"

Missy shook her head.

"Why, he's always in the papers! Everywhere he goes, women knock each other down to kiss him! The papers are full of it—don't say you've never heard of it!"

But Missy shook her head again, an expression of distaste on her face. A man that let women knock each other down to kiss him! Missy had ideals about kissing. She had never been kissed by any one but her immediate relatives and some of her girl friends, but she had her dreams of kisses—kisses such as the poets wrote about. Kissing was something fine, beautiful, sacred! As sacred as getting married. But there was nothing sacred about kissing whole bunches of people who knocked each other down—people you didn't even know. Missy felt a surge of revulsion against this Dobson who could so profane a holy thing.

"I think it's disgusting," she said.

At the unexpected harshness of her tone Raymond glanced at her in some surprise.

"And they call him a hero!" she went on scathingly.

"Oh, I guess he's all right," replied Raymond, who was secretly much impressed by the dash of Dobson. "It's just that women make fools of themselves over him."

"You mean he makes a fool of himself! I think he's disgusting. I wouldn't go to hear him speak for worlds!"

Raymond wisely changed the subject. And Missy soon enough forgot the disgusting Dobson in the press of nearer trials. She must get at that outline; she wanted to do it, and yet she shrank from beginning. As often happens when the mind is restless, she had an acute desire to do something with her hands. She wanted to go ahead with Marguerite's hat, but mother, who had a headache and was cross, put her foot down. "Not another minute of dawdling till you write that thesis!" she said, and she might as well have been Gabriel—or whoever it is who trumpets on the day of doom.

So Missy once more took up tablet and pencil. But what's the use commanding your mind, "Now, write!" Your mind can't write, can it?—till it knows what it's going to write about. No matter how much the rest of you wants to write.

At supper-time Missy had no appetite. Mother was too ill to be at the table, but father noticed it.

"Haven't caught mamma's headache, have you?" he asked solicitously.

Missy shook her head; she wished she could tell father it was her soul that ached. Perhaps father sensed something of this for, after glancing at her two or three times, he said:

"Tell you what!—Suppose you go to the lecture with me to-night. Mamma says she won't feel able. What do you say?"

Missy didn't care a whit to hear the disgusting Dobson, but she felt the reason for her reluctance mightn't be understood—might even arouse hateful

merriment, for Aunt Nettie was sitting there listening. So she said evasively:

"I think mother wants me to work on my thesis."

"Oh, I can fix it with mother all right," said father.

Missy started to demur further but, so listless was her spirit, she decided it would be easier to go than to try getting out of it. She wouldn't have to pay attention to the detestable Dobson; and she always loved to go places with father.

And it *was* pleasant, after he had "fixed it" with mother, to walk along the dusky streets with him, her arm tucked through his as if she were a grown-up. Walking with him thus, not talking very much but feeling the placidity and sense of safety that always came over her in father's society, she almost forgot the offensive celebrity awaiting them in the Opera House.

Afterward Missy often thought of her reluctance to go to that lecture, of how narrowly she had missed seeing Dobson. The narrow margins of fate! What if she *hadn't* gone! Oh, life is thrillingly uncertain and interwoven and mysterious!

The Opera House was crowded. There were a lot of women there, the majority of them staid Cherryvale matrons who were regular subscribers to the Lyceum Course, but Missy, regarding them severely, wondered if they were there hoping to get kissed.

Presently Mr. Siddons, who dealt in "Real Estate and Loans" and passed the plate at the Presbyterian church, came out on the platform with an-

other man. Mr. Siddons was little and wiry and dark and not handsome; Missy didn't much care for him as it is not possible to admire a man who looks as if he ought to run up a tree and chatter and swing from a limb by a tail; besides he was well known to be "stingy." But his soul must be all right, since he was a deacon; and he was a leading citizen, and generally introduced speakers at the Lyceum Course. He began his familiar little mincing preamble: "It gives me great pleasure to have the privilege of introducing to you a citizen so distinguished and esteemed—"

Esteemed!

Then the other man walked forward and stood beside the little table with the glass and pitcher of water on it. Missy felt constrained to cast a look at the Honourable Ridgeley Holman Dobson.

Well, he was rather handsome, in a way—one had to admit that; he was younger than you expect lecturers to be, and tall and slender, with awfully good-looking clothes, and had dark eyes and a noticeable smile—too noticeable to be entirely sincere and spontaneous, Missy decided.

He began to speak, about something that didn't seem particularly interesting to Missy; so she didn't pay much attention to what he was saying, but just sat there listening to the pleasing flow of his voice and noting the graceful sweep of his hands—she must remember that effective gesture of the palm held outward and up. And she liked the way, now and then, he threw his head back and paused and smiled.

Suddenly she caught herself smiling, almost as if in response, and quickly put on a sternly grave look. This woman-kissing siren!—or whatever you call men that are like women sirens. Well, she, for one, wouldn't fall for his charms! *She* wouldn't rush up and knock other women down to kiss him!

She was flaunting her disapproval before her as a sort of banner when, finally, the lecturer came to an end and the audience began their noisy business of getting out of their seats. Missy glanced about, suspicious yet alertly inquisitive. *Would* the women rush up and kiss him? Her eyes rested on prim Mrs. Siddons, on silly Miss Lightner, on fat, motherly Mrs. Allen, Kitty's mother. Poor Kitty, if her mother should so disgrace herself!—Missy felt a moment's thankfulness that her own mother was safely home in bed.

A lot of people were pushing forward up the aisle toward the lecturer; some were already shaking hands with him—men as well as women.

Then Missy heard herself uttering an amazing, unpremeditated thing:

"Would you like to go up and shake hands with Mr. Dobson, father?"

The moment after, she was horrified at herself. Why had she said that? *She* didn't want to shake hands with a repulsive siren!

But father was answering:

"What? You, too!"

Just what did he mean by that? And by that quizzical sort of smile? She felt her cheeks growing

hot, and wanted to look away. But, now, there was nothing to do but carry it through in a casual kind of way.

"Oh," she said, "I just thought, maybe, it might be interesting to shake hands with such a celebrity."

"I see," said father. He was still smiling but, taking hold of her arm, he began to elbow a slow progress toward the platform.

Just before they reached it, Missy felt a sudden panicky flutter in her heart. She shrank back.

"You go first," she whispered.

So father went first and shook hands with Mr. Dobson. Then he said:

"This is my daughter."

Not able to lift her eyes, Missy held out her hand; she observed that Mr. Dobson's was long and slender but had hair on the back of it—he ought to do something about that; but even as she thought this, the hand was enclosing hers in a clasp beautifully warm and strong; and a voice, wonderfully deep and pleasant and vibrant, was heard saying:

"Your daughter?—you're a man to be envied, sir."

Then Missy forced her eyes upward; Mr. Dobson's were waiting to meet them squarely—bright dark eyes with a laugh in the back of them. And, then, the queerest thing happened. As he looked at her, that half-veiled laugh in his eyes seemed to take on a special quality, something personal and intimate and kindred—as if saying: "*You* and *I* understand, don't we?"

Missy's heart gave a swift, tumultuous dive and flight.

Then he let go her hand, and patiently turned his eyes to the next comer; but not with the same expression—Missy was sure of that. She walked on after her father in a kind of daze. The whole thing had taken scarcely a second; but, oh! what can be encompassed in a second!

Missy was very silent during the homeward journey; she intensely wanted to be silent. Once father said:

"Well, the man's certainly magnetic—but he seems a decent kind of fellow. I suppose a lot has been exaggerated." He chuckled. "But I'll bet some of the Cherryvale ladies are a little disappointed."

"Oh, *that!*" Missy felt a hot flame of indignation flare up inside her. "*He* wouldn't act *that* way! anybody could tell. I think it's a crime to talk so about him!"

Father gave another chuckle, very low; but Missy was too engrossed with her resentment and with other vague, jumbled emotions to notice it.

That night she had difficulty in getting to sleep. And, for the first time in weeks, visions of Commencement failed to waft her off to dreams. She was hearing over and over, in a kind of lullaby, a deep, melodious voice: "Your daughter?—you're a man to be envied, sir!"—was seeing a pair of dark bright eyes, smiling into her own with a beam of kinship ineffable.

Next day, at school, she must listen to an after-

math of gossipy surmise anent the disappointing osculatory hero. At last she could stand it no longer.

"I think it's horrid to talk that way! Anybody can see he's not that kind of man!"

Raymond Bonner stared.

"Why, I thought you said he was disgusting!"

But Missy, giving him a withering look, turned and walked away, leaving him to ponder the baffling contrarieties of the feminine sex.

A new form of listlessness now took hold of Missy. That afternoon she didn't want to study, didn't want to go over to Kitty Allen's when her friend telephoned, didn't even want to work on hats; this last was a curious turn, indeed, and to a wise observer might have been significant. She had only a desire to be alone, and was grateful for the excuse her thesis provided her; though it must be admitted precious little was inscribed, that bright May afternoon, on the patient tablet which kept Missy company in the summerhouse.

At supper, while the talk pivoted inevitably round the departed Dobson, she sat immersed in preoccupation so deep as to be conspicuous even in Missy. Aunt Nettie, smiling, once started to make a comment but, unseen by his dreaming daughter, was silenced by Mr. Merriam. And immediately after the meal she'd eaten without seeing, the faithful tablet again in hand, Missy wandered back to the summerhouse.

It was simply heavenly out there now. The whole

western sky clear to the zenith was laid over with a solid colour of opaque saffron rose; and, almost halfway up and a little to the left, in exactly the right place, of deepest turquoise blue, rested one mountain of cloud; it was the shape of Fujiyama, the sacred mount of Japan, which was pictured in Aunt Isabel's book of Japanese prints. Missy wished she might see Japan—Mr. Dobson had probably been there—lecturers usually were great travellers. He'd probably been everywhere—led a thrilling sort of life—the sort of life that makes one interesting. Oh, if only she could talk to him—just once. She sighed. Why didn't interesting people like that ever come to Cherryvale to *live?* Everybody in Cherryvale was so—so commonplace. Like Bill Cummings, the red-haired bank teller, who thought a trip to St. Louis an adventure to talk about for months! Or like old Mr. Siddons, or Professor Sutton, or the clerks in Mr. Bonner's store. In Cherryvale there was only this settled, humdrum kind of people. Of course there were the boys; Raymond was nice—but you can't expect mere boys to be interesting. She recalled that smiling, subtly *intimate* glance from Mr. Dobson's eyes. Oh, if *he* would stay in Cherryvale just a week! If only he'd come back just once! If only—

"Missy! The dew's falling! You'll catch your death of cold! Come in the house at once!"

Bother! there was mother calling. But mothers must be obeyed, and Missy had to trudge dutifully indoors—with a tablet still blank.

Next morning mother's warning about catching cold fulfilled itself. Missy awoke with a head that felt as big as a washtub, painfully laborious breath, and a wild impulse to sneeze every other minute. Mother, who was an ardent advocate of "taking things in time," ordered a holiday from school and a footbath of hot mustard water.

"This all comes from your mooning out there in the summerhouse so late," she chided as, with one tentative finger, she made a final test of the water for her daughter's feet.

She started to leave the room.

"Oh, mother!"

"Well?" Rather impatiently Mrs. Merriam turned in the doorway.

"Would you mind handing me my tablet and pencil?"

"What! there in the bath?"

"I just thought"—Missy paused to sneeze—"maybe I might get an inspiration or something, and couldn't get out to write it down."

"You're an absurd child." But when she brought the tablet and pencil, Mrs. Merriam lingered to pull the shawl round Missy's shoulders a little closer; Missy always loved mother to do things like this—it was at such times she felt most keenly that her mother loved her.

Yet she was glad to be left alone.

For a time her eyes were on her bare, scarlet feet in the yellow mustard water. But that unbeautiful colour combination did not disturb her. She did not

even see her feet. She was seeing a pair of bright dark eyes smiling intimately into her own.

Presently, with a dreamy, abstracted smile, she opened the tablet, poised the pencil, and began to write. But she was scarcely conscious of any of this, of directing her pencil even; it was almost as if the pencil, miraculously, guided itself. And it wrote.

. . . . . .

"Are you ready to take your feet out now, Missy?"

Missy raised her head impatiently. It was Aunt Nettie in the door. What was she talking about—feet?—feet? How *could* Aunt Nettie?

"Oh! go away, won't you, *please?*" she cried vehemently.

"Well, did you ever?" gasped Aunt Nettie. She stood in the doorway a minute; then tiptoed away. But Missy was oblivious; the inspired pencil was speeding back and forth again—"*Then each craft passes on into the unutterable darkness—*" and the pencil, too, went on and on.

. . . . . .

There was the sound of tiptoeing again at the door, of whispering; but the author took no notice. Then someone entered, bearing a pitcher of hot water; but the author gave no sign. Someone poured hot water into the foot-tub; the author wriggled her feet.

"Too hot, dear?" said mother's voice.

The author shook her head abstractedly. Words were singing in her ears to drown all else. They flowed through her whole being, down her arms, out through her hand and pencil, wrote themselves immortally. Oh, this was Inspiration! Feeling at last immeshed in tangibility, swimming out on a tide of words that rushed along so fast pencil could hardly keep up with them. Oh, Inspiration! The real thing! Divine, ecstatic, but fleeting; it must be caught at the flood.

The pencil raced.

And sad, indeed, is that life which sails on its own way, wrapped in its own gloom, giving out no signal and heeding none, hailing not its fellow and heeding no hail. For the gloom will grow greater and greater; there will be no sympathy to tide it over the rocks; no momentary gleams of love to help it through its struggle; and the storms will rage fiercer and the sails will hang lower until, at last, it will go down, alone and unwept, never knowing the joy of living and never reaching the goal.

So let these ships, which have such a vast, such an unutterable influence, use that influence for brightening the encompassing gloom. Let them not be wrapped in their own selfishness or sorrow, but let their voice be filled with hope and love. For, by so doing, the waters of Life will grow smoother, and the signals will never flicker.

The inspired instrument lapsed from nerveless fingers; the author relaxed in her chair and sighed a deep sigh. All of a sudden she felt tired, tired; but it is a blessed weariness that comes after a divine frenzy has had its way with you.

Almost at once mother was there, rubbing her feet with towels, hustling her into bed.

"Now, you must keep covered up a while," she said.

Missy was too happily listless to object. But, from under the hot blankets, she murmured:

"You can read the Valedictory if you want to. It's all done."

Commencement night arrived. Twenty-odd young, pulsing entities were lifting and lilting to a brand-new, individual experience, each one of them, doubtless, as firmly convinced as the class Valedictorian that he—or she—was the unique centre round which buzzed this rushing, bewitchingly upsetting occasion.

Yet everyone had to admit that the Valedictorian made a tremendous impression: a slender girl in white standing alone on a lighted stage—only one person in all that assemblage was conscious that it was the identical spot where once stood the renowned Dobson—gazing with luminous eyes out on the darkened auditorium. It was crowded out there but intensely quiet, for all the people were listening to the girl up there illumined: the lift and fall of her voice, the sentiments fine, noble, and inspiring. They followed the slow grace of her arms and hands—it was, indeed, as if she held them in the hollow of her hand.

She told all about the darkness our souls sail through under their sealed orders, knowing neither course nor port—and, though you may be calloused to these trite figures, are they not solemnly true

enough, and moving enough, if you take them to heart? And with that slim child alone up there speaking these things so feelingly, it was easy for Cherryvale in the hushed and darkened auditorium to feel with her. . . .

Sometimes they pass oblivious of one another in the gloom; sometimes a signal flashes from out the darkness; a signal which is understood as though an intense ray pierced the enveloping pall and laid bare both souls. That signal is the light from a pair of human eyes, which are the windows of the soul, and by means of which alone soul can stand revealed to soul . . .

The emotional impression of this was tremendous on all these dear Souls who had sailed alongside of Missy since she was launched.

So let these ships, which have such a vast, such an unutterable influence, use that influence for brightening the encompassing gloom. . . . For, by so doing, the waters of Life will grow smoother, and the signals will never flicker.

She came to the last undulating cadence, the last vibrantly sustained phrase; and then, as she paused and bowed, there was a moment of hush—and then the applause began. Oh, what applause! And then, slowly, graciously, modestly but with a certain queenly pride, the shining figure in white turned and left the stage.

Here was a noble triumph, remembered for years even by the teachers. Down in the audience father and mother and grandpa and grandma and all the other relatives who, with suspiciously wet eyes, were

assembled in the "reserved section," overheard such murmurs as: "And she's seventeen!—Where do young folks get those ideas?"—and, "What an unusual gift of phraseology!" And, after the programme, a reporter from the *Cherryvale Beacon* came up to father and asked permission to quote certain passages from the Valedictory in his "write-up." That was the proudest moment of Mr. Merriam's entire life.

Missy had time for only hurried congratulations from her family. For she must rush off to the annual Alumni banquet. She was going with Raymond Bonner who, now, was hovering about her more zealously than ever. She would have preferred to share this triumphant hour with—with—well, with someone older and more experienced and better able to understand. But she liked Raymond; once, long ago—a whole year ago—she'd had absurd dreams about him. Yet he was a nice boy; the nicest and most sought-after boy in the class. She was not unhappy at going off with him.

Father and mother walked home alone, communing together in that pride-tinged-with-sadness that must, at times, come to all parents.

Mother said:

"And to think I was so worried! That hat-making, and then that special spell of idle mooning over something-or-nothing, nearly drove me frantic."

Father smiled through the darkness.

"I suppose, after all," mother mused on, surreptitiously wiping those prideful eyes, "that there *is*

something in Inspiration, and the dear child just had to wait till she got it, and that she doesn't know any more than we do where it came from."

"No, I daresay *she* doesn't." But sometimes father was more like a friend than a parent, and that faint, unnoted stress was the only sign he ever gave of what he knew about this Inspiration.

X

Missy Cans the Cosmos

AS far back as Melissa Merriam could remember, she had lived with her family in the roomy, rambling, white-painted house on Locust Avenue. She knew intimately every detail of its being. She had, at various points in her childhood, personally supervised the addition of the ell and of the broad porch which ran round three sides of the house, the transformation of an upstairs bedroom into a regular bathroom with all the pleasing luxuries of modern plumbing, the installation of hardwood floors into the "front" and "back" parlours. She knew every mousehole in the cellar, every spider-web and cracked window-pane in the fascinating attic.

And the yard without she also knew well: the friendly big elm which, whenever the wind blew, tapped soft leafy fingers against her own window; the slick green curves of the lawn; the trees best loved by the birds; the morning-glories on the porch which resembled fairy church bells ready for ringing, the mignonette in the flower-beds like fragrant fairy plumes, and the other flowers—all so clever at growing up into different shapes and colours when you considered they all came from little hard brown

seeds. And she was familiar with the summerhouse back in the corner of the yard, so ineffably delicious in rambler-time, but so bleakly sad in winter; and the chicken-yard just beyond she knew, too—Missy loved that peculiar air of placidity which pervades even the most clucky and cackly of chicken-yards, and she loved the little downy chicks which were so adept at picking out their own mothers amongst those hens that looked all alike. When she was a little girl she used to wonder whether the mothers grieved when their children grew up and got killed and eaten and, for one whole summer, she wouldn't eat fried chicken though it was her favourite delectable.

All of which means that Missy, during the seventeen years of her life, had never found her homely environment dull or unpleasing. But, this summer, she found herself longing, with a strange, secret but burning desire, for something "different."

The feeling had started that preceding May, about the time she made such an impression at Commencement with her Valedictory entitled "Ships That Pass in the Night." The theme of this oration was the tremendous influence that can trail after the chancest and briefest encounter of two strangers. No one but herself (and her father, though Missy did not know it) connected Missy's eloquent handling of this subject with the fleeting appearance in Cherryvale of one Ridgeley Holman Dobson. Dobson had given a "Lyceum Course" lecture in the Opera House, but Missy remembered him not because of what he lec-

tured about, nor because he was an outstanding hero of the recent Spanish-American war, nor even because of the scandalous way his women auditors, sometimes, rushed up and kissed him. No. She remembered him because . . . Oh, well, it would have been hard to explain concretely, even to herself; but that one second, when she was taking her turn shaking hands with him after the lecture, there was something in his dark bright eyes as they looked deeply into her own, *something* that made her wish —made her wish—

It was all very vague, very indefinite. If only Cherryvale afforded a chance to know people like Ridgeley Holman Dobson! Unprosaic people, really interesting people. People who had travelled in far lands; who had seen unusual sights, plumbed the world's possibilities, done heroic deeds, laid hands on large affairs.

But what chance for this in poky Cherryvale?

This tranquil June morning, as Missy sat in the summerhouse with the latest *Ladies' Home Messenger* in her lap, the dissatisfied feeling had got deeper hold of her than usual. It was not acute discontent —the kind that sticks into you like a sharp splinter; it was something more subtle; a kind of dull hopelessness all over you. The feeling was not at all in accord with the scene around her. For the sun was shining gloriously; Locust Avenue lay wonderfully serene under the sunlight; the iceman's horses were pulling their enormous wagon as if it were not heavy; the big, perspiring iceman whistled as if those huge,

dripping blocks were featherweight; and, in like manner, everybody passing along the street seemed contented and happy. Missy could remember the time when such a morning as this, such a scene of peaceful beauty, would have made her feel contented, too.

Now she sighed, and cast a furtive glance through the leafage toward the house, a glance which reflected an inner uneasiness because she feared her mother might discover she hadn't dusted the parlours; mother would accuse her of "dawdling." Sighing again for grown-ups who seldom understand, Missy turned to the *Messenger* in her lap.

Here was a double-page of "Women Who Are Achieving"—the reason for the periodical's presence in Missy's society. There was a half-tone of a lady who had climbed a high peak in the Canadian Rockies; Missy didn't much admire her unfeminine attire, yet it was something to get one's picture printed—in any garb. Then there was a Southern woman who had built up an industry manufacturing babies' shoes. This photograph, too, Missy studied without enthusiasm: the shoemaker was undeniably middle-aged and matronly in appearance; nor did the *métier* of her achievement appeal. Making babies' shoes, somehow, savoured too much of darning stockings. (Oh, bother! there was that basket of stockings mother had said positively *mustn't* go another day.)

Missy's glance hurried to the next picture. It presented the only lady Sheriff in the state of Colorado.

Missy pondered. Politics—Ridgeley Holman Dobson was interested in politics; his lecture had been about something-or-other political—she wished, now, she'd paid more attention to what he'd talked about. Politics, it seemed, was a promising field in the broadening life of women. And they always had a Sheriff in Cherryvale. Just what were a Sheriff's duties? And how old must one be to become a Sheriff? This Colorado woman certainly didn't look young. She wasn't pretty, either—her nose was too long and her lips too thin and her hair too tight; perhaps lady Sheriffs had to look severe so as to enforce the law. Missy sighed once more. It would have been pleasant to feel she was working in the same field with Ridgeley Holman Dobson.

Then, suddenly, she let her sigh die half-grown as her eye came to the portrait of another woman who had achieved. No one could claim this one wasn't attractive-looking. She was young and she was beautiful, beautiful in a peculiarly perfected and aristocratic way; her hair lay in meticulously even waves, and her features looked as though they had been chiselled, and a long ear-ring dangled from each tiny ear. Missy wasn't surprised to read she was a noblewoman; her name was Lady Sylvia Southwoode—what an adorable name!

The caption underneath the picture read:

"Lady Sylvia Southwoode, Who Readjusts—and Adorns—the Cosmos."

Missy didn't catch the full editorial intent, perhaps, in that grouping of Lady Sylvia and the Cos-

mos; but she was pleased to come upon the word Cosmos. It was one of her pet words. It had struck her ear and imagination when she first encountered it, last spring, in Psychology IV–A. *Cosmos*—what an infinity of meaning lay behind the two-syllabled sound! And the sound of it, too, sung itself over in your mind, rhythmic and fascinating. There was such a difference in words; some were but poor, bald things, neither suggesting very much nor very beautiful to hear. Then there were words which were beautiful to hear, which had a rich sound — words like "mellifluous" and "brocade" and "Cleopatra." But "Cosmos" was an absolutely fascinating word—perfectly round, without beginning or end. And it was the kind to delight in not only for its wealth, so to speak, for all it held and hinted, but also for itself alone; it was a word of sheer beauty.

She eagerly perused the paragraph which explained the manner in which Lady Sylvia was readjusting—and adorning—the Cosmos. Lady Sylvia made speeches in London's West End—wherever that was—and had a lot to do with bettering the Housing Problem — whatever that was — and was noted for the distinguished gatherings at her home. This alluring creature was evidently in politics, too!

Missy's eyes went dreamily out over the yard, but they didn't see the homely brick-edged flowerbeds nor the red lawn-swing nor the well-worn hammock nor the white picket fence in her direct line of vision. They were contemplating a slight girlish

figure who was addressing a large audience, somewhere, speaking with swift, telling phrases that called forth continuous ripples of applause. It was all rather nebulous, save for the dominant girlish figure, which bore a definite resemblance to Melissa Merriam.

Then, with the sliding ease which obtains when fancy is the stage director, the scene shifted. Vast, elaborately beautiful grounds rolled majestically up to a large, ivy-draped house, which had turrets like a castle—very picturesque. At the entrance was a flight of wide stone steps, overlaid, now, with red carpet and canopied with a striped awning. For the mistress was entertaining some of the nation's notables. In the lofty hall and spacious rooms glided numberless men-servants in livery, taking the wraps of the guests, passing refreshments, and so forth. The guests were very distinguished-looking, all the men in dress suits and appearing just as much at home in them as Ridgeley Holman Dobson had, that night on the Opera House stage. Yes, and *he* was there, in Missy's vision, handsomer than ever with his easy smile and graceful gestures and that kind of intimate look in his dark eyes, as he lingered near the hostess whom he seemed to admire. All the women were in low-cut evening dresses of softly-tinted silk or satin, with their hair gleaming in sleek waves and long ear-rings dangling down. The young hostess wore ear-rings, also; deep-blue gems flashed out from them, to match her trailing deep-blue velvet gown—Raymond Bonner had once said

Missy should always wear that special shade of deep blue.

Let us peep at the actual Missy as she sits there dreaming: she has neutral-tinted brown hair, very soft and fine, which encircles her head in two thick braids to meet at the back under a big black bow; that bow, whether primly-set or tremulously-askew, is a fair barometer of the wearer's mood. The hair is undeniably straight, a fact which has often caused Missy moments of concern. (She used to envy Kitty Allen her tangling, light-catching curls till Raymond Bonner chanced to remark he considered curly hair "messy looking"; but Raymond's approval, for some reason, doesn't seem to count for as much as it used to, and, anyway, he is spending the summer in Michigan.) However, just below that too-demure parting, the eyes are such as surely to give her no regret. Twin morning-glories, we would call them—*grey* morning-glories!—opening expectant and shining to the Sun which always shines on enchanted seventeen. And, like other morning-glories, Missy's eyes are the shyest of flowers, ready to droop sensitively at the first blight of misunderstanding. That is the chiefest trouble of seventeen: so few are there, especially among old people, who seem to "understand." And that is why one must often retire to the summerhouse or other solitary places where one can without risk of ridicule let one's dreams out for air.

Presently she shook off her dreams and returned to the scarcely less thrilling periodical which had

evoked them. Here was another photograph—though not nearly so alluring as that of the Lady Sylvia; a woman who had become an authoritative expounder of political and national issues—politics again! Missy proceeded to read, but her full interest wasn't deflected till her eyes came to some thought-compelling words:

"It was while yet a girl in her teens, in a little Western town ("Oh!" thought Missy), that Miss Carson mounted the first rung of the ladder she has climbed to such enviable heights. She had just graduated from the local high school ("Oh! oh!" thought Missy) and, already prodded by ambition, persuaded the editor of the weekly paper to give her a job. . . ."

Once again Missy's eyes wandered dreamily out over the yard. . . .

Presently a voice was wafted out from the side-porch:

"Missy!—oh, Missy! Where are you?"

There was mother calling—bother! Missy picked up the *Ladies' Home Messenger* and trudged back to bondage.

"What in the world do you mean, Missy? You could write your name all over the parlour furniture for dust! And then those stockings—"

Missy dutifully set about her tasks. Yet, ah! it certainly is hard to dust and darn while one's soul is seething within one, straining to fly out on some really high enterprise of life. However one can, if one's soul strains hard enough, dust and dream; darn

and dream. Especially if one has a helpful lilt, rhythmic to dust-cloth's stroke or needle's swing, throbbing like a strain of music through one's head:

Cosmos—Cosmos!—Cosmos—Cosmos!

Missy was absent-eyed at the midday dinner, but no sooner was the meal over before she feverishly attacked the darning-basket again. Her energy may have been explained when, as soon as the stockings were done, she asked her mother if she might go down to the Library.

Mother and Aunt Nettie from their rocking-chairs on the side-porch watched the slim figure in its stiffly-starched white duck skirt and shirt-waist disappear down shady Locust Avenue.

"I wonder what Missy's up to, now?" observed Aunt Nettie.

"Up to?" murmured Mrs. Merriam.

"Yes. She hardly touched her chop at dinner and she's crazy about lamb chops. She's eaten almost nothing for days. And either shirking her work, else going at it in a perfect frenzy!"

"Growing girls get that way sometimes," commented Missy's mother gently. (Could Missy have heard and interpreted that tone, she might have been less hard on grown-ups who "don't understand.") "Missy's seventeen, you know."

"H'm!" commented Aunt Nettie, as if to say, "What's *that* to do with it?" Somehow it seems more difficult for spinsters than for mothers to remember those swift, free flights of madness and sweetness which, like a troop of birds in the im-

measurable heavens, sweep in joyous circles across the sky of youth.

Meanwhile Missy, the big ribbon index under her sailor-brim palpitantly askew, was progressing down Locust Avenue with a measured, accented gait that might have struck an observer as being peculiar. The fact was that the refrain vibrating through her soul had found its way to her feet. She'd hardly been conscious of it at first. She was just walking along, in time to that inner song:

"Cosmos—cosmos—cosmos—cosmos—"

And then she noticed she was walking with even, regular steps, stepping on every third crack in the board sidewalk, and that each of these cracks she stepped on ran, like a long punctuation, right through the middle of "cosmos." So that she saw in her mind this picture:

|Cos|mos| |cos|mos| |cos|mos| |cos|mos|

It was fascinating, watching the third cracks punctuate her thoughts that way. Then it came to her that it was a childish sort of game—she was seventeen, now. So she avoided watching the cracks. But "Cosmos" went on singing through her head and soul.

She came to Main Street and, ignoring the turn eastward which led to the Public Library, faced deliberately in the opposite direction.

She was, in fact, bound for the office of the *Beacon*, the local weekly. And thoughts of what tremendous possibilities might be stretching out from this very

hour, and of what she would say to Ed Martin, the editor, made her feet now skim along impatiently, and now slow down with sudden, self-conscious shyness.

For Missy, even when there was no steadily nearing imminence of having to reveal her soul, on general principles was a little in awe of Ed Martin and his genial ironies. Ed Martin was not only a local celebrity. His articles were published in the big Eastern magazines. He went "back East" once a year, and it was said that on one occasion he had dined with the President himself. Of course that was only a rumour; but Cherryvale had its own eyes for witness that certain persons had stopped off in town expressly to see Ed Martin—personages whose names made you take notice!

Missy, her feet terribly reluctant now, her soul's song barely a whisper, found Ed Martin shirt-sleeved in his littered little sanctum at the back of the *Beacon* office.

"Why, hello, Missy!" he greeted, swinging round leisurely in his revolving-chair. Ed Martin was always so leisurely in his movements that the marvel was how he got so much accomplished. Local dignitaries of the most admired kind, perhaps, wear their distinction as a kind of toga; but Ed was plump and short, with his scant, fair hair always rumpled, and a manner as friendly as a child's.

"Haven't got another Valedictory for us to print, have you?" he went on genially.

Missy blushed.

"I just dropped in for a minute," she began uneasily. "I was just thinking—" She hesitated and paused.

"Yes," said Ed Martin encouragingly.

"I was just thinking—that perhaps—" She clasped her hands tightly together and fixed her shining eyes on him in mute appeal. Then:

"You see, Mr. Martin, sometimes it comes over you—" She broke off again.

Ed Martin was regarding her out of friendly blue eyes.

"Maybe I can guess what sometimes comes over you. You want to write—is that it?"

His kindly voice and manner emboldened her.

"Yes—it's part that. And a feeling that— Oh, it's so hard to put into words, Mr. Martin!"

"I know; feelings are often hard to put into words. But they're usually the most worth while kind of feelings. And that's what words are for."

"Well, I was just feeling that at my age—that I was letting my life slip away—accomplishing nothing really worth while. You know—?"

"Yes, we all feel like that sometimes, I guess." Ed Martin nodded with profound solemnity.

Oh, Ed Martin was wonderful! He *did* understand things! She went ahead less tremulously now.

"And I was feeling I wanted to get started at something. At something *really* worth while, you know."

Ed Martin nodded again.

"And I thought, maybe, you could help me get started—or something." She gazed at him with open-eyed trust, as if she expected him with a word to solve her undefined problem.

"Get started?—at writing, you mean?"

Oh, *how* wonderfully Ed Martin understood!

He shuffled some papers on his desk. "Just what do you want to write, Missy?"

"I don't know, exactly. When I can, I'd like to write something sort of political—or cosmic."

"Oh," said Ed Martin, nodding. He shuffled the papers some more. Then: "Well, when that kind of a germ gets into the system, I guess the best thing to do is to get it out before it causes mischief. If it coagulates in the system, it can cause a lot of mischief."

Just what did he mean?

"Yes, a devil of a lot of mischief," he went on. "But the trouble is, Missy, we haven't got any job on politics or—or the cosmos open just now. But—"

He paused, gazing over her head. Missy felt her heart pause, too.

"Oh, *any* kind of a writing job," she proffered quaveringly.

"I can't think of anything here that's not taken care of, except"—his glance fell on the ornate-looking "society page" of the Macon City Sunday *Journal*, spread out on his desk—"a society column."

In her swift breath of ecstasy Missy forgot to note the twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, I'd love to write society things!"

Ed Martin sat regarding her with a strange expression on his face.

"Well," he said at last, as if to himself, "why not?" Then, addressing her directly: "You may consider yourself appointed official Society Editor of the *Cherryvale Beacon.*"

The title rolled with surpassing resonance on enchanted ears. She barely caught his next remark.

"And now about the matter of salary—"

Salary! Missy straightened up.

"What do you say to five dollars a week?" he asked.

Five dollars a week!—Five dollars every week! And earned by herself! Missy's eyes grew big as suns.

"Is that satisfactory?"

"Oh, *yes!*"

"Well, then," he said, "I'll give you free rein. Just get your copy in by Wednesday night—we go to press Thursdays—and I promise to read every word of it myself."

"Oh," she said.

There were a thousand questions she'd have liked to ask, but Ed Martin, smiling a queer kind of smile, had turned to his papers as if anxious to get at them. No; she mustn't begin by bothering him with questions. He was a busy man, and he'd put this new, big responsibility on *her*—"a free rein," he had said. And she must live up to that trust; she must find her own way—study up the problem of society editing, which, even if not her ideal, yet was a wedge

to who-knew-what? And meanwhile perhaps she could set a new standard for society columns—brilliant and clever . . .

Missy left the *Beacon* office, suffused with emotions no pen, not even her own, could ever have described.

Ed Martin, safely alone, allowed himself the luxury of an extensive grin. Then, even while he smiled, his eyes sobered.

"Poor young one." He sighed and shook his head, then took up the editorial he was writing on the delinquencies of the local waterworks administration.

Meanwhile Missy, moving slowly back up Main Street, was walking on something much softer and springier than the board sidewalk under her feet. She didn't notice even the cracks, now. The acquaintances who passed her, and the people sitting contentedly out on their shady porches, seemed in a different world from the one she was traversing. She had never known this kind of happiness before—exploring a dream country which promised to become *real.* Now and then a tiny cloud shadowed the radiance of her emotions: just how would she begin? —what should she write about and how?—but swiftly her thoughts flitted back to that soft, warm, undefined deliciousness. . . .

Society Editor!—*she,* Melissa Merriam! Her words would be immortalized in print! and she would soar up and up. . . . Some day, in the big magazines . . . Everybody would read her name there—all Cherryvale—and, perhaps, Ridgeley Holman Dobson

would chance a brilliant, authoritative article on some deep, vital subject and wish to meet the author. She might even have to go to New York to live—*New York!* And associate with the interesting, delightful people there. Maybe *he* lived in New York, or, anyway, visited there, associating with celebrities.

She wished her skirts were long enough to hold up gracefully like Polly Currier walking over there across the street; she wished she had long, dangling ear-rings; she wished . .

Dreamy-eyed, the Society Editor of the *Cherryvale Beacon* turned in at the Merriam gate to announce her estate to an amazed family circle.

Aunt Nettie, of course, ejaculated, "goodness gracious!" and laughed. But mother was altogether sweet and satisfying. She looked a little startled at first, but she came over and smoothed her daughter's hair while she listened, and, for some reason, was unusually tender all the afternoon.

That evening at supper-time, Missy noticed that mother walked down the block to meet father, and seemed to be talking earnestly with him on their way toward the house. Missy hadn't much dreaded father's opposition. He was an enormous, silent man and the young people stood in a certain awe of him, but Missy, somehow, felt closer to him than to most old people.

When he came up the steps to the porch where she waited, blushing and palpitant but withal feeling a sense of importance, he greeted her jovially.

"Well, I hear we've got a full-fledged writer in our midst!"

Missy's blush deepened.

"What *I* want to know," father continued, "is who's going to darn my socks? I'm afraid socks go to the dickens when genius flies in at the window."

As Missy smiled back at him she resolved, despite everything, to keep father's socks in better order than ever before.

During supper the talk kept coming back to the theme of her Work, but in a friendly, unscoffing way so that Missy knew her parents were really pleased. Mother mentioned Mrs. Brooks's "bridge" Thursday afternoon—that might make a good write-up. And father said he'd get her a leather-bound notebook next day. And when, after supper, instead of joining them on the porch, she brought tablet and pencil and a pile of books and placed them on the dining-table, there were no embarrassing comments, and she was left alone with her thrills and puzzlements.

Among the books were Stevenson's "Some Technical Considerations of Style," George Eliot's "Romola" and Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus"; the latter two being of the kind that especially lifted you to a mood of aching to express things beautifully. Missy liked books that lifted you up. She loved the long-drawn introspections of George Eliot and Augusta J. Evans; the tender whimsy of Barrie as she'd met him through "Margaret Ogilvie" and "Sentimental Tommy"; the fascinating mysteries of Marie Corelli;

the colourful appeal of "To Have and To Hold" and the other "historical romances" which were having a vogue in that era; and Kipling's India!—that was almost best of all. She had outgrown most of her earlier loves—Miss Alcott whom she'd once known intimately, and "Little Lord Fauntleroy" and "The Birds' Christmas Carol" had survived, too, her brief illicit passion for the exotic product of "The Duchess." And she didn't respond keenly to many of the "best sellers" which were then in their spectacular, flamboyantly advertised heyday; somehow they failed to stimulate the mind, stir the imagination, excite the emotions—didn't lift you up. Yet she could find plenty of books in the Library which satisfied.

Now she sat, reading the introspections of "Romola" till she felt her own soul stretching out—up and beyond the gas table-lamp glowing there in such lovely serenity through its gold-glass shade; felt it aching to express something, she knew not what. Some day, perhaps, after she had written intellectual essays about Politics and such things, *she* might write about Life. About Life itself! And the Cosmos!

Her chin sank to rest upon her palm. How beautiful were those pink roses in their leaf-green bowl—like a soft piece of music or a gently flowing poem. Maybe Mrs. Brooks would have floral decorations at her bridge-party. She hoped so—then she could write a really satisfying kind of paragraph—flowers were always so inspiring. Those pink petals were just about to fall. Yet, somehow, that made them

seem all the lovelier. She could almost write a poem about that idea! Would Mr. Martin mind if, now and then, she worked in a little verse or two? It would make Society reporting more interesting. For, she had to admit, Society Life in Cherryvale wasn't thrilling. Just lawn-festivals and club meetings and picnics at the Waterworks and occasional afternoon card-parties where the older women wore their Sunday silks and exchanged recipes and household gossip. If only there was *something* interesting—just a little dash of "atmosphere." If only they drank afternoon tea, or talked about Higher Things, or smoked cigarettes, or wore long ear-rings! But, perhaps, some day—in New York . . .

Missy's head drooped; she felt deliciously drowsy. Into the silence of her dreams a cheerful voice intruded:

"Missy, dear, it's after ten o'clock and you're nodding! Oughtn't you go up to bed?"

"All right, mother." Obediently she took her dreams upstairs with her, and into her little white bed.

Thursday afternoon, all shyness and importance strangely compounded, Missy carried a note-book to Mrs. Brooks's card-party. It was agreeable to hear Mrs. Brooks effusively explain: "Missy's working on the *Beacon* now, you know"; and to feel two dozen pairs of eyes upon her as she sat writing down the list of guests; and to be specially led out to view the refreshment-table. There was a profusion of flowers, but as Mrs. Brooks didn't have much

"taste" Missy didn't catch the lilt of inspiration she had hoped for.

However, after she had worked her "write-up" over several times, she prefixed a paragraph on the decorations which she hoped would atone for the drab prosiness of the rest. It ran:

"Through the softly-parted portières which separate Mrs. J. Barton Brooks's back-parlour from the dining room came a gracious emanation of scent and colour. I stopped for a moment in the doorway, and saw, abloom there before me, a magical maze of flowers. Flowers! Oh, multifold fragrance and tints divine which so ineffably enrich our lives! Does anyone know whence they come? Those fragile fairy creatures whose housetop is the sky; wakened by golden dawn; for whom the silver moon sings lullaby. Yes; sunlight it is, and blue sky and green earth, that endow them with their mysterious beauty; these, and the haze of rain that filters down when clouds rear their sullen heads. Sun and sky, and earth and rain; they alone may know—know the secrets of these fairy-folk who, from their slyly-opened petals, watch us at our hurrying business of life. We, mere humans, can never know. With us it must suffice to sweeten our hearts with the memory of fragrant flowers."

She was proud of that opening paragraph. But Ed Martin blue-pencilled it.

"Short of space this week," he said. "Either the flowers must go or 'those present.' It's always best to print names."

"Is the rest of it all right?" asked Missy, crestfallen.

"Well," returned Ed, with whom everything had gone wrong that day and who was too hurried to remember the fluttering pinions of Youth, "I guess it's printable, anyhow."

It was "printable," and it did come out in print—that was something! For months the printed account of Mrs. Brooks's "bridge" was treasured in the Merriam archives, to be brought out and passed among admiring relatives. Yes, that was something!

But, as habitude does inevitably bring a certain staleness, so, as the pile of little clipped reports grew bigger Missy's first prideful swell in them grew less. Perhaps it would have been different had not the items always been, perforce, so much the same. There was so little chance to be "original"—one must use the same little forms and phrases over and over again: "A large gathering assembled on Monday night at the home of—" "Mrs. So-and-so, who has been here visiting Mrs. What's-her-name, has returned—" One must crowd as much as possible into as little space as possible. That was hard on Missy, who loved words and what words could do. She wasn't allowed much latitude with words even for "functions." "Function" itself had turned out to be one of her most useful words since it got by Ed Martin and, at the same time, lent the reported affair a certain distinguished air.

It was at a function—an ice-cream festival given

by the Presbyterian ladies on Mrs. Paul Bonner's lawn—that Missy met Archie Briggs.

She had experienced a curious, vague stir of emotions about going to the Bonner home that evening; it was the first time she'd ever gone there when Raymond Bonner wasn't present. Raymond was the handsomest and most popular boy in her "crowd," and she used to be secretly pleased when he openly admired her more than he did the other girls—indeed, there had been certain almost sentimental passages between Raymond and Missy. Of course all that happened before her horizon had "broadened"—before she encountered a truly distinguished person like Ridgeley Holman Dobson. Yet memories can linger to disturb, and Missy was accompanied by memories that moonlit Wednesday evening when, in her "best" dress of pale pink organdie, she carried her note-book to the Bonners' to report the lawn-festival.

She had hesitated over the pink organdie; not many of the "crowd" were going, and it was to be for her a professional rather than a social occasion. Perhaps it was sentiment that carried the day. Anyway, she was soon to be glad she'd worn the pink organdie.

Before she had a chance to get in any professional work, Mrs. Bonner bore down on her with a tall young man, a stranger.

"Oh, Missy! I want you to meet Raymond's cousin, Archie Briggs. Archie, this is one of Raymond's friends, Miss Merriam."

Missy was grateful for that "Miss Merriam."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Merriam," said Mr. Briggs. He was dark and not very good-looking—not nearly so good-looking as Raymond—but there was something in his easy, self-assured manner that struck her as very *distingué*. She was impressed, too, by the negligent way in which he wore his clothes; not nearly so "dressed-up" looking as the Cherryvale boys, yet in some subtle way declassing them. She was pleased that he seemed to be pleased with her; he asked her to "imbibe" some ice-cream with him.

They sat at one of the little tables out on the edge of the crowd. From there the coloured paper lanterns, swaying on the porch and strung like fantastic necklaces across the lawn, were visible yet not too near; far enough away to make it all look like an unreal, colourful picture. And, above all, a round orange moon climbing up the sky, covering the scene with light as with golden water, and sending black shadows to crawl behind bushes and trees. It was all very beautiful; and Mr. Briggs, though he didn't speak of the scene at all, made a peculiarly delightful companion for that setting. He was "interesting."

He talked easily and in a way that put her at her ease. She learned that he and his sister, Louise, had stopped off in Cherryvale for a few days; they were on their way back to their home in Keokuk, Iowa, from a trip to California. Had Miss Merriam ever been in California?

No; she'd never been in California. Missy hated to make the admission; but Mr. Briggs seemed the kind of youth not to hold it against a pretty girl to give him a chance to exploit his travels. She was a flattering listener. And when, after California had been disposed of, he made a wide sweep to "the East," where, it developed, he attended college—had Miss Merriam ever been back East?

No; she'd never been back East. And then, with a big-eyed and appreciatively murmuring auditor, he dilated on the supreme qualities of that foreign spot, on the exotic delights of football and regattas and trips down to New York for the "shows." Yes, he was "interesting"! Listening, Missy forgot even Mr. Ridgeley Holman Dobson. Here was one who had travelled far, who had seen the world, who had drunk deep of life, and who, furthermore, was near to her own age. And, other things being equal, nothing can call as youth calls youth. She wasn't conscious, at the time, that her idol was in danger of being replaced, that she was approaching something akin to faithlessness; but something came about soon which brought her a vague disturbance.

Missy, who had all but forgotten that she was here for a serious purpose, suddenly remembered she had to get her "copy" into the office by ten o'clock; for the paper went to press next morning.

"I must go now and see some of the ladies," she said reluctantly.

"Well, of course, if you'd rather talk to the ladies—" responded Mr. Briggs, banteringly.

"Oh, it's not that!" She felt a sense of satisfaction in her own importance as she went on to explain:

"I want to ask details and figures and so forth for my report in the paper—I'm society editor of the *Beacon*, you know."

"Society editor!—*you?* For Pete's sake!"

At first Missy took his tone to denote surprised admiration, and her little thrill of pride intensified. But he went on:

"What on earth are you wasting time on things like that for?"

"Wasting time—?" she repeated. Her voice wavered a little.

"I'd never have suspected you of being a highbrow," Mr. Briggs continued.

Missy felt a surge akin to indignation—he didn't seem to appreciate her importance, after all. But resentment swiftly gave way to a kind of alarm: why didn't he appreciate it?

"Don't you like highbrows?" she asked, trying to smile.

"Oh, I suppose they're all right in their place," said Mr. Briggs lightly. "But I never dreamed *you* were a highbrow."

It was impossible not to gather that this poised young man of the world esteemed her more highly in his first conception of her. Impelled by the eternal feminine instinct to catch at possibly flattering personalities, Missy asked:

"What *did* you think I was?"

"Well," replied Mr. Briggs, smiling, "I thought you were a mighty pretty girl—the prettiest I've seen in this town." (Missy couldn't hold down a fluttering thrill, even though she felt a premonition that certain lofty ideals were about to be assailed.) "The kind of girl who likes to dance and play tennis and be a good sport, and all that."

"But can't a—" Missy blushed; she'd almost said "a pretty girl." "Can't *that* kind of girl be—intellectual, too?"

"The saints forbid!" ejaculated Mr. Briggs with fervour.

"But don't you think that everyone ought to try to enlarge one's field of vision?"

At that Mr. Briggs threw back his head and laughed a laugh of unrestrained delight.

"Oh, it's too funny!" he chortled. "That line of talk coming from a girl who looks like *you* do!"

Even at that disturbed moment, when she was hearing sacrilege aimed at her most cherished ideals —perilously swaying ideals, had she but realized it— Missy caught the pleasing significance of his last phrase, and blushed again. Still she tried to stand up for those imperilled ideals, forcing herself to ask:

"But surely you admire women who achieve—women like George Eliot and Frances Hodgson Burnett and all those?"

"I'd hate to have to take one of them to a dance," said Mr. Briggs.

Missy turned thoughtful; there were sides to "achievement" she hadn't taken into consideration.

"Speaking of dances," Mr. Briggs was continuing, "my aunt's going to give Louise and me a party before we go—maybe Saturday night."

A party! Missy felt a thrill that wasn't professional.

Mr. Briggs leaned closer, across the little table.

"If you're not already booked up," he said, "may I call for you Saturday night?"

Missy was still disturbed by some of the things Mr. Briggs had said. But it was certainly pleasant to have a visiting young man—a young man who lived in Keokuk and travelled in California and attended college in the East—choose her for his partner at his own party.

Later that night at the *Beacon* office, after she had turned in her report of the Presbyterian ladies' *fête*, she lingered at her desk. She was in the throes of artistic production:

"Mr. Archibald Briggs of Keokuk is visiting Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bonner."

That was too bald; not rich enough. She tried again:

"Mr. Archibald Briggs of Keokuk, Iowa, is visiting at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bonner on Maple Avenue."

Even that didn't lift itself up enough out of the ordinary. Missy puckered her brows; a moist lock fell down and straggled across her forehead. With interlineations, she enlarged:

"Mr. Archibald Briggs, who has been travelling in California and the Far West, on his way to his home in Keokuk, Iowa, is

visiting at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bonner in Maple Avenue."

An anxious scrutiny; and then "on his way" was amended to "*en route.*"

That would almost do. And then, as she regarded the finished item, a curious feeling crept over her: a sort of reluctance, distaste for having it printed—printing it herself, as it were. That seemed, somehow, too—too public. And then, as she sat in a maze of strange emotions, a sudden thought came to the rescue:

His sister—Louise! She'd forgotten to include Louise! How terrible if she'd left out his sister! And adding the second name would remove the *personal* note. She quickly interlined again, and the item stood complete:

"Mr. Archibald Briggs and Miss Louise Briggs, who have been travelling in California and the Far West, *en route* to their home in Keokuk, Iowa, are visiting at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bonner in Maple Avenue."

As her father entered the office to take her home, Missy gave a deep sigh, a sigh of mingled satisfaction and exhaustion such as seals a difficult task well done.

Late as it was when she reached home, Missy lingered long before her mirror. With the aid of a hand-glass she critically studied her pink organdie from every angle. She wished she had a new dress; a delicate wispy affair of cream net—the colour of moonlight—would be lovely and aristocratic-looking. And with some subtle but distinguished colour

combination, like dull blue and lilac, for the girdle. That would be heavenly. But one can't have a new dress for every party. Missy sighed, and tilted back the dresser mirror so as to catch the swing of skirt about her shoe-tops. She wished the skirt was long and trailing; there was a cluster of tucks above the hem—maybe mother would allow her to let one out; she'd ask to-morrow.

Then she tilted the mirror back to its normal position; maybe mother would allow her to turn in the neck just a wee bit lower—like this. That glimpse of throat would be pretty, especially with some kind of necklace. She got out her string of coral. No. The jagged shape of coral was effective and the colour was effective, but it didn't "go" with pale pink. She held up her string of pearl beads. That was better. But ah! if only she had some long pearl pendants, to dangle down from each ear; she knew just how to arrange her hair—something like Lady Sylvia Southwoode's—so as to set them off.

She was engaged in parting her hair in the centre and rolling it back in simple but aristocratic-looking "puffs" on either side—she *did* look the least bit like Lady Sylvia!—when she heard her mother's voice calling:

"Missy! haven't you gone to bed yet?"

"No, mother," she answered meekly, laying down the brush very quietly.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Nothing—I'm going to bed right now," she answered, more meekly yet.

"You'd better," came the unseen voice. "You've got to get up early if you're going to the picnic."

The picnic—oh, bother! Missy had forgotten the picnic. If it had been a picnic of her own "crowd" she would not have forgotten it, but she was attending this function because of duty instead of pleasure. And it isn't especially interesting to tag along with a lot of children and their Sunday-school teachers. She wondered if, maybe, she could manage to get her "report" without actually going.

But she'd already forgotten the picnic by the time she crept into her little bed, across which the moon, through the window, spread a shining breadth of silver. She looked at the strip of moonlight drowsily—how beautiful moonlight was! And when it gleamed down on dewy grass . . . everything outdoors white and magical . . . and dancing on the porch . . . he must be a wonderful dancer—those college boys always were . . . music . . . the scent of flowers . . . "the prettiest girl I've seen in this town" . . .

Yes; the bothersome picnic was forgotten; and the *Beacon*, alluring stepping-stone to achievements untold; yes, even Ridgeley Holman Dobson himself. The moon, moving its gleaming way slowly up the coverlet, touched tenderly the face of the sleeper, kissed the lips curved into a soft, dreaming smile.

Missy went to the picnic next day, for her mother was unsympathetic toward the suggestion of contriving a "report." "Now, Missy, don't begin that again! You're always starting out to ride some en-

thusiasm hard, and then letting it die down. You must learn to see things through. Now, go and get your lunch ready."

Missy meekly obeyed. It wasn't the first time she'd been rebuked for her unstable temperament. She was meek and abashed; yet it is not uninteresting to know one possesses an unstable temperament which must be looked after lest it prove dangerous.

The picnic was as dull as she had feared it would be. She usually liked children but, that day, the children at first were too riotously happy and then, as they tired themselves out, got cross and peevish. Especially the Smith children. One of the teachers said the oldest little Smith girl seemed to have fever; she was sick—as if that excused her acting like a little imp! She ought to have been kept at home—the whole possessed Smith tribe ought to have been kept at home!

Missy wished she herself were at home. She'd probably missed a telephone call from Mr. Briggs—he had said he might call up. She could hardly wait to reach home and find out.

Yes; he had telephoned. Also Mrs. Bonner, inviting Missy to a party on Saturday night. Missy brightened. She broached the subject of letting out a tuck. But mother said the pink organdie was long enough—too long, really. And Aunt Nettie chimed in:

"Why is it that girls can never get old quickly enough? The time'll come soon enough when they'll wish they could wear short dresses again!"

Missy listened with inner rebellion. Why did old people always talk that way—that "you-don't-appreciate-you're-having-the-best-time-of-your-life" sort of thing?

Next day was Friday—the day before the party. It was also "cleaning day" at the Merriams' and, though Missy felt lassitudinous and headachy, she put extra vim into her share of the work; for she wished to coax from mother a new sash, at least. But when Saturday came she didn't mention the sash; her headache had increased to such a persistent throbbing she didn't feel like going down to look over the Bonner Mercantile Co.'s stock of ribbons. She was having trouble enough concealing her physical distress. At dinner mother had noticed that she ate almost nothing; and at supper she said:

"Don't you feel well, Missy?"

"Oh, yes, I feel all right—fine!" replied Missy, trying to assume a sprightly air.

"You look flushed to me. And sort of heavy around the eyes—don't you think so, papa?"

"She does look sort of peaked," affirmed Mr. Merriam.

"She's been dragging around all day," went on the mother. Missy tried harder than ever to "perk up"—if they found out about the headache, like as not they'd put a taboo on the party—grown-ups were so unreasonable. Parties were *good* for headaches.

"I heard over at Mrs. Allen's this afternoon," Aunt Nettie put in, "that there's measles in town. All the Smith children are down with it."

Missy recalled the oldest little Smith girl, with the fever, at the picnic, but said nothing.

"I wonder if Missy could have run into it anywhere," said mother anxiously.

"*Me?*" ejaculated the Society Editor, disdainfully. "*Children* have measles!"

"Children! Listen to her!" jeered Aunt Nettie with delight.

"I've *had* the measles," Missy went on. "And anyway I feel fine!" So saying, she set to to make herself eat the last mouthful of the blackberry cobbler she didn't want.

It was hard to concentrate on her toilette with the fastidious care she would have liked. Her arms were so heavy she could scarcely lift them to her head, and her head itself seemed to have jagged weights rolling inside at her slightest movement. She didn't feel up to experimenting with the new coiffure *à la* Lady Sylvia Southwoode; even the exertion of putting up her hair the usual way made her uncomfortably conscious of the blackberry cobbler.

She wasn't yet dressed when Mr. Briggs called for her. Mother came in to help.

"Sure you feel all right?" she enquired solicitously.

"Oh, yes—fine!" said Missy.

She was glad, on the rather long walk to the Bonners', that Mr. Briggs was so easy to talk to—which meant that Mr. Briggs did most of the talking. Even at that it was hard to concentrate on his con-

versation sufficiently to make the right answers in the occasional lulls.

And things grew harder, much harder, during the first dance. The guests danced through the big double parlours and out the side door on to the big, deep porch. It was inspiringly beautiful out there on the porch: the sweet odour of honeysuckle and wistaria and "mock orange" all commingled; and the lights shining yellow out of the windows, and the paler, glistening light of the moon spreading its fairy whiteness everywhere. It was inspiringly beautiful; and the music was divine—Charley Kelley's orchestra was playing; and Mr. Briggs was a wonderful dancer. But Missy couldn't forget the oppressive heat, or the stabbing weights in her head, or, worse yet, that blackberry cobbler.

As Mr. Briggs was clapping for a second encore, she said tremulously:

"Will you excuse me a minute?—I must run upstairs—I forgot my handkerchief."

"Let me get it for you," offered Mr. Briggs gallantly.

"No! oh, no!" Her tone was excited and, almost frantically, she turned and ran into the house and up the stairs.

Up there, in the bedroom which was temporarily the "ladies' cloak-room," prostrate on the bed, Mrs. Bonner found her later. Missy protested she was now feeling better, though she thought she'd just lie quiet awhile. She insisted that Mrs. Bonner make no fuss and go back down to her guests.

Mrs. Bonner, after bringing a damp towel and some smelling-salts, left her. But presently Missy heard the sound of tip-toeing steps, and lifted a corner of the towel from off her eyes. There stood Mr. Briggs.

"Say, this is too bad!" he commiserated. "How's the head?"

"It's better," smiled Missy wanly. It wasn't better, in fact, but a headache isn't without its advantages when it makes a young man forsake dancing to be solicitous.

"Sure it's better?"

"Sure," replied Missy, her smile growing a shade more wan.

"Because if it isn't—" Mr. Briggs began to rub his palms together briskly—"I've got electricity in my hands, you know. Maybe I could rub it away."

"Oh," said Missy.

Her breathing quickened. The thought of his rubbing her headache away, his hands against her brow, was alarming yet exhilarating. She glanced up as she felt him removing the towel from her head, then quickly down again. She felt, even though her face was already fiery hot, that she was blushing. She was embarrassed, her head was racking, but on the whole she didn't dislike the situation.

Mr. Briggs unlinked his cuffs, turned back his sleeves, laid his palms on her burning brow, and began a slow, pressing movement outward, in both directions, toward her temples.

"That feel good?" he asked.

"Yes," murmured Missy. She could scarcely voice the word; for, in fact, the pressure of his hands seemed to send those horrible weights joggling worse than ever, seemed to intensify the uneasiness in her throat—though she wouldn't for worlds let Mr. Briggs think her unappreciative of his kindness.

The too-kind hands stroked maddeningly on.

"Feel better now?"

"Yes," she gasped.

Things, suddenly, seemed going black. If he'd only stop a minute! Wouldn't he ever stop? How could she make him stop? What could she do? The whole world, just then, seemed to be composed of the increasing tumult in her throat, the piercing conflict in her head, and those maddening strokes—strokes—strokes—strokes. How long *could* she stand it?

Presently, after eons it seemed, she desperately evoked a small, jerky voice.

"I think—it must—be getting worse. Thanks, but— Oh, won't you—*please*—go away?"

She didn't open her eyes to see whether Mr. Briggs looked hurt, didn't open them to see him leave the room. She was past caring, now, whether he was hurt or not. She thought she must be dying.

And she thought she must be dying, later, while Mrs. Bonner, aided by a fluttering, murmuring Louise, attended her with sympathetic ministrations; and again while she was being taken home by Mr. Bonner in the Bonner surrey—she had never dreamed a surrey could bump and lurch and jostle so.

But people seldom die of measles; and that was what young Doc Alison, next morning, diagnosed her malady. It seemed that there is more than one kind of measles and that one can go on having one variety after another, *ad nauseam*, so to speak.

"The case is well developed—you should have called me yesterday," said young Doc rebukingly.

"I *knew* you were sick yesterday!" chided mother. "And to think I let you go to that party!"

"Party?" queried young Doc. "What party?—when?"

Then he heard about the function at the Bonners', and Missy's *débâcle*.

"Well," he commented, "I'll bet there'll be a fine little aftermath of measles among the young folks of this town."

The doctor's prophecy was to fulfill itself. On her sick-bed Missy heard the reports of this one and that one who, in turn, were "taken down." For the others she was sorry, but when she learned Mr. Archibald Briggs had succumbed, she experienced poignant emotions. Her emotions were mingled: regret that she had so poorly repaid a deed of gallant service but, withal, a regret tempered by the thought they were now suffering together—he ill over there in Raymond Bonner's room, she over here in hers—enduring the same kind of pain, taking the same kind of medicine, eating the same uninteresting food. Yes, it was a bond. It even, at the time, seemed a romantic kind of bond.

Then, when days of convalescence arrived, she

wrote a condoling note to the two patients at the Bonners'—for Louise had duly "taken down," also; and then, as her convalescence had a few days' priority over theirs, she was able to go over and visit them in person.

Friendships grow rapidly when people have just gone through the same sickness; people have so much in common to talk about, get to know one another so much more intimately—the real essence of one another. For instance Missy within a few days learned that Louise Briggs was an uncommonly nice, sweet, "cultured" girl. She enlarged on this point when she asked her mother to let her accept Louise's invitation to visit in Keokuk.

"She's the most refined girl I've ever met, mother —if you know what I mean."

"Yes—?" said mother, as if inviting more.

"She's going to a boarding-school in Washington, D. C., this winter."

"Yes—?" said mother again.

"And she's travelled a lot, but not a bit uppish. I think that kind of girl is a good influence to have, don't you?"

Mother, concentrated on an intricate place in her drawn-work, didn't at once answer. Missy gazed at her eagerly. At last mother looked up.

"But what about your work on the *Beacon?*" she asked.

"Oh, I've thought about that," Missy returned glibly. "And I really think a trip of this kind would do me more good than just hanging round a

poky newspaper office. Travel, and a different sphere—Keokuk's a big town, and there seems to be a lot going on there. It's really a good chance to enlarge my field of vision—to broaden my horizon—don't you see, mother?"

Mother bent her head lower over her work.

"Are you sure the thought of parties and a lot going on and—" mother paused a second—"and Archie has nothing to do with it, dear?"

Missy didn't mind the teasing hint about Archie when mother said "dear" in that tone. It meant that mother was weakening.

Nor did thoughts of the abandoned Cosmos trouble her very much during the blissfully tumultuous days of refurbishing her wardrobe and packing her trunk. Nor when she wrote a last society item for Ed Martin to put in the *Beacon:*

"Miss Melissa Merriam of Locust Avenue has gone for a two weeks' visit at the home of Miss Louise Briggs in Keokuk, Iowa."

The little item held much in its few words. It was a swan-song.

As Ed Martin inelegantly put it, in speaking later with her father, Missy had "canned the Cosmos."

THE END

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